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MIGHTIEST MONARCH OF A TIME-LOST LAND!
KING CONAN
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™
M. SILVESTRI & R. VILLAMONTE

Stan Lee PRESENTS: KING CONAN

Featuring The Epic Adventurer Created By ROBERT E. HOWARD

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CIRCLE OF SORCERY
WHILE THE KUSHITE JUMBASSA VENTS HIS SCARCELY CONTROLLED RAGE--AND WHILE URAZAI OF KHITAI LISTENS IN CRAFTY RESERVE...
...THE OPHIREAN SORCERESS SCYLLANA, FROM A DOZEN PACES DISTANT, LANGUIDLY BUILDS A HOUSE OF CARDS.
OUR PAWNS HAVE FAILED TIME AND AGAIN --MIMUS, HIS DAUGHTER DARWEENA, CYNNERA AND HER DEATH-SHAPER, THE CREATURES IN THE TOMBS UNDER TARANTIA, THE DEMON MURGOR-TSOGGUA --ALL OF THEM FAILED!
AND CONAN STILL SITS THE THRONE OF AQUILONIA!
YES, JUMBASSA... IT IS GETTING TIRESOME...
WE HAVE TIME.

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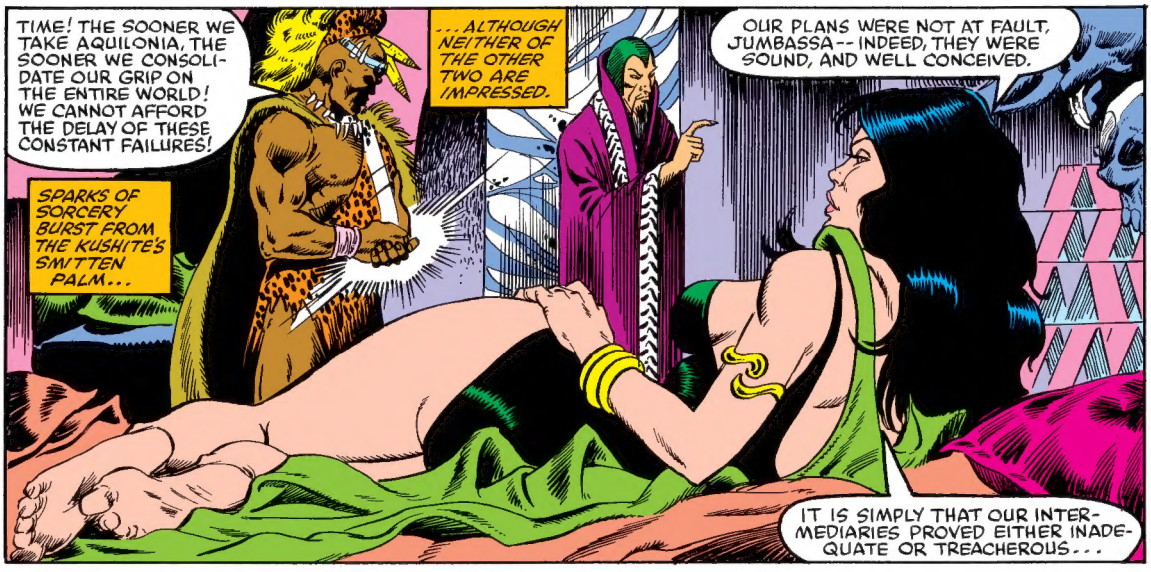
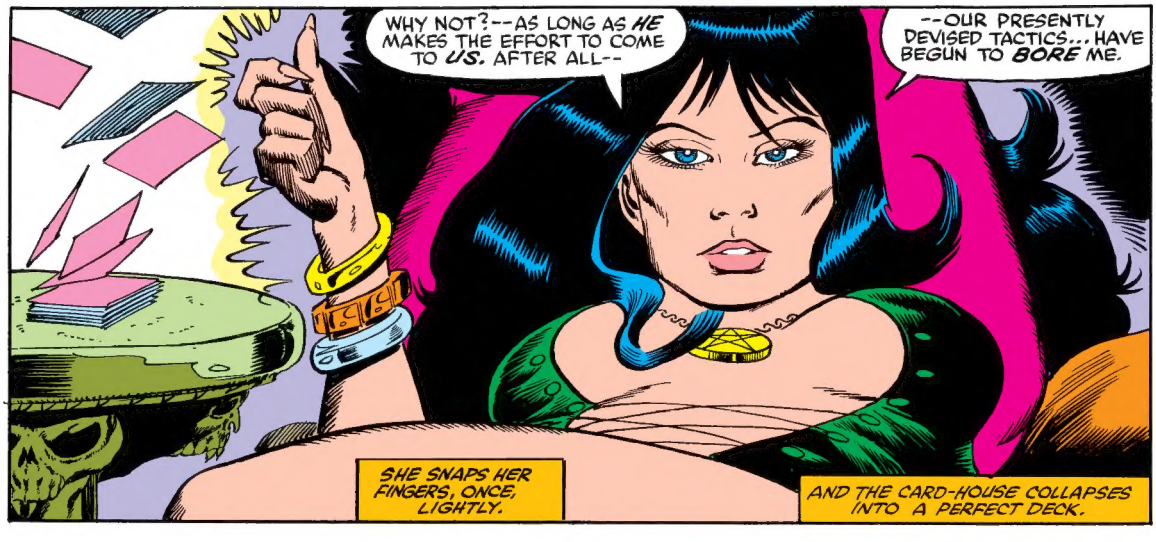

TIME! THE SOONER WE TAKE AQUILONIA, THE SOONER WE CONSOLIDATE OUR GRIP ON THE ENTIRE WORLD! WE CANNOT AFFORD THE DELAY OF THESE CONSTANT FAILURES!
SPARKS OF SORCERY BURST FROM THE KUSHITE'S SMITTEN PALM...
...ALTHOUGH NEITHER OF THE OTHER TWO ARE IMPRESSED.
OUR PLANS WERE NOT AT FAULT, JUMBASSA-- INDEED, THEY WERE SOUND, AND WELL CONCEIVED.
IT IS SIMPLY THAT OUR INTERMEDIARIES PROVED EITHER INADEQUATE OR TREACHEROUS...

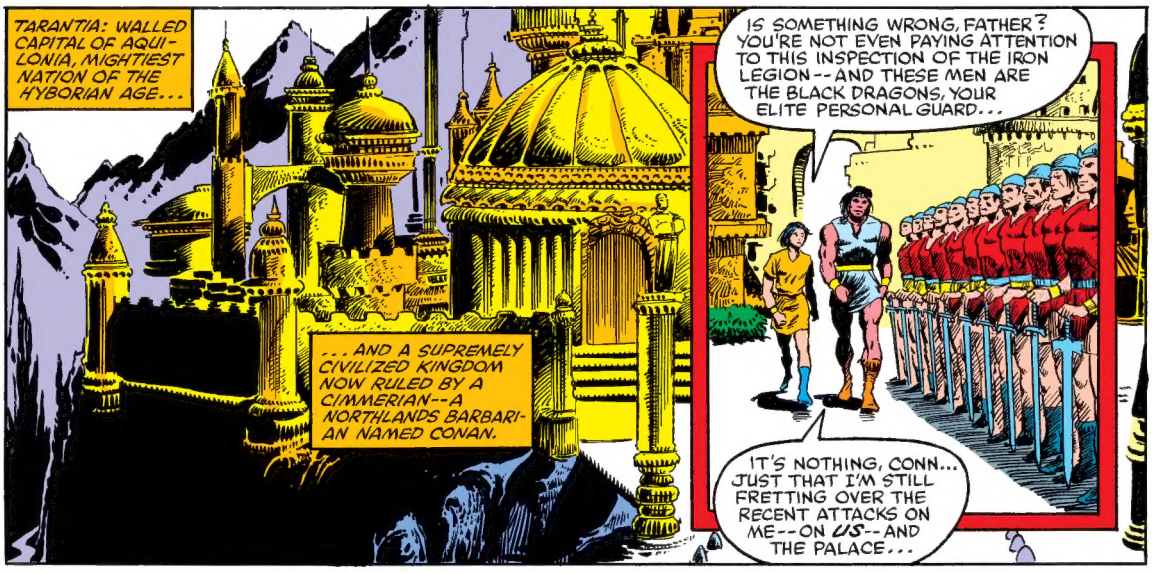
ARE YOU SUGGESTING, SCYLLANA, THAT WE HAVE FAILED BECAUSE WE HAVE BEEN TOO INDIRECT?
PRECISELY, URAZAI.
WHAT DO YOU THINK, JUMBASSA?

I THINK YOU ARE BOTH MAD! YOU WOULD HAVE US DIRECTLY CONFRONT CONAN-- OURSELVES?

IT'S A THOUGHT, JUMBASSA. AFTER ALL, WE FORM A CABAL OF THE THREE MOST POWERFUL WIZARDS IN EXISTENCE.
AS I SAY, IT'S A THOUGHT... AND I THINK OUR SISTER SCYLLANA LIKES THE THOUGHT.

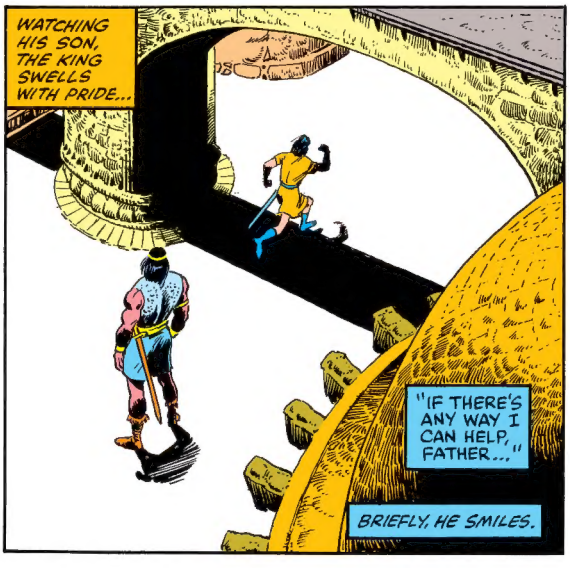

WHY NOT?--AS LONG AS HE MAKES THE EFFORT TO COME TO US. AFTER ALL--
--OUR PRESENTLY DEVISED TACTICS... HAVE BEGUN TO BORE ME.
SHE SNAPS HER FINGERS, ONCE, LIGHTLY.
AND THE CARD-HOUSE COLLAPSES INTO A PERFECT DECK.

NOW EVEN THE KUSHITE WARMS TO THE BOLD NOTION...
AYE -- WE CAN WAGER ON THE OUTCOME!
THE FIRST ONE OF US TO SKIN HIS BONES...WINS THE PRIZE!
AND THE PRIZE, JUMBASSA?-- OTHER THAN AQUILONIA, THAT IS...
OTHER THAN THE SOURCE OF POWER AQUILONIA REPRESENTS FOR THREE SUCH AS US?
WHY NOT YOUR SIGHT CRYSTAL, SCYLLANA--?
URAZA! AND I HAVE BOTH LUSTED AFTER IT FOR AGES...
YES...SUCH A PRIZE WOULD BE AGREEABLE TO ME.
AND IF I WIN, BROTHER SORCERERS? WHAT PRIZE, THEN, DO I TAKE?
SATISFACTION, SCYLLANA...THAT YOUR LONG BOREDOM HAS COME TO AN END.
FOR JUMBASSA, THERE IS MORE THAN HUMOR IN THE KHITAIN MAGE'S WORDS...
THERE IS, APPARENTLY, A VAST AND MYSTIC POWER OF DARK MIRTH...
...AND AS HE ROARS, THE ENTIRE CHAMBER SEEMS TO QUAKE.
SCYLLANA MERELY SMILES, ALREADY DREAMING OF A DIFFERENT PRIZE--A PRIZE OF STRONG FLESH AND BRIGHT BLOOD.

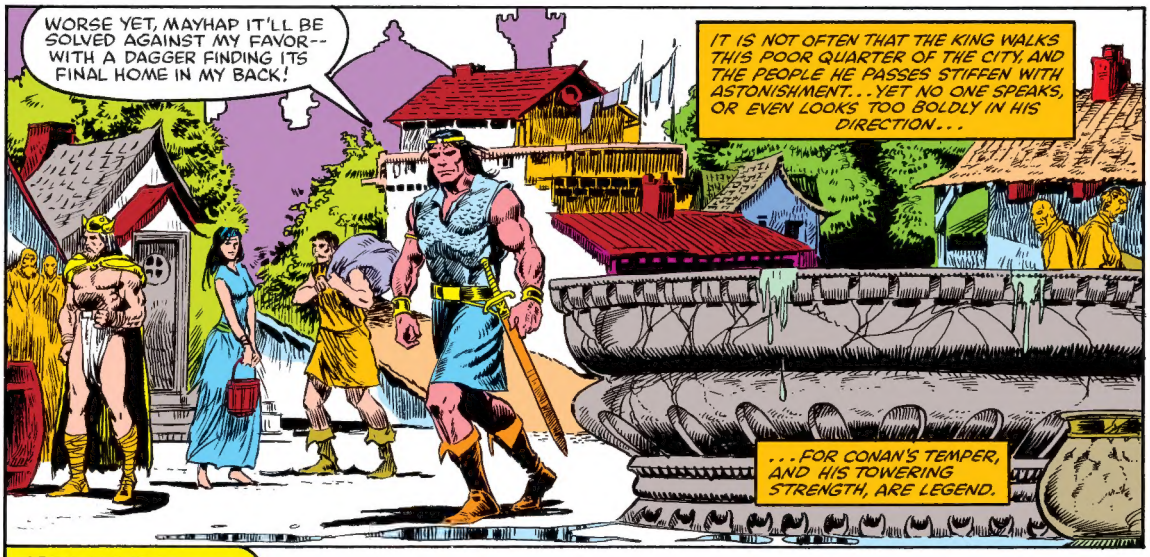

TARANTIA: WALLED CAPITAL OF AQUILONIA, MIGHTIEST NATION OF THE HYBORIAN AGE...
...AND A SUPREMELY CIVILIZED KINGDOM NOW RULED BY A CIMMERIAN--A NORTHLANDS BARBARIAN NAMED CONAN.
IS SOMETHING WRONG, FATHER? YOU'RE NOT EVEN PAYING ATTENTION TO THIS INSPECTION OF THE IRON LEGION--AND THESE MEN ARE THE BLACK DRAGONS, YOUR ELITE PERSONAL GUARD...
IT'S NOTHING, CONN... JUST THAT I'M STILL FRETTING OVER THE RECENT ATTACKS ON ME--ON US--AND THE PALACE...

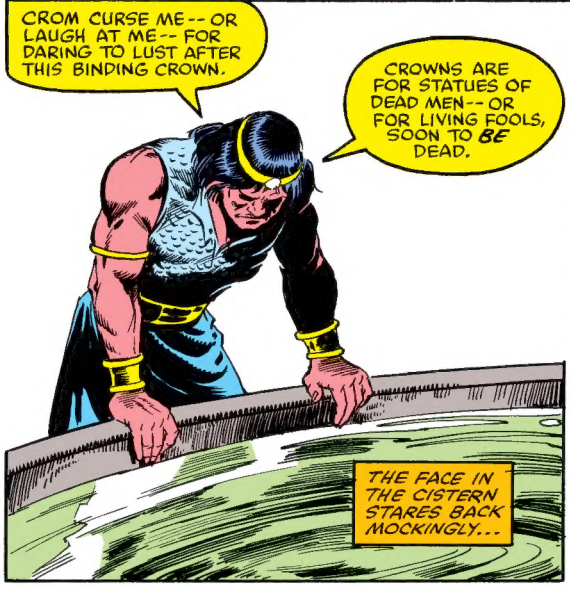
CROM KNOWS I CAN'T GET TO THE BOTTOM OF THIS SHADOWY REBELLION...
BUT FATHER--YOU'VE DONE A GOOD JOB OF EXPOSING AND DEFEATING EVERYONE AND EVERYTHING THAT'S COME AT YOU THUS FAR.
AYE, BUT THEY WERE JUST THE SMALL FRY, CONN. I'M STILL NO CLOSER TO KNOWING ANYTHING ABOUT THE REAL POWERS--THE BIG FISH--BEHIND ALL THE LESSER ATTACKS.

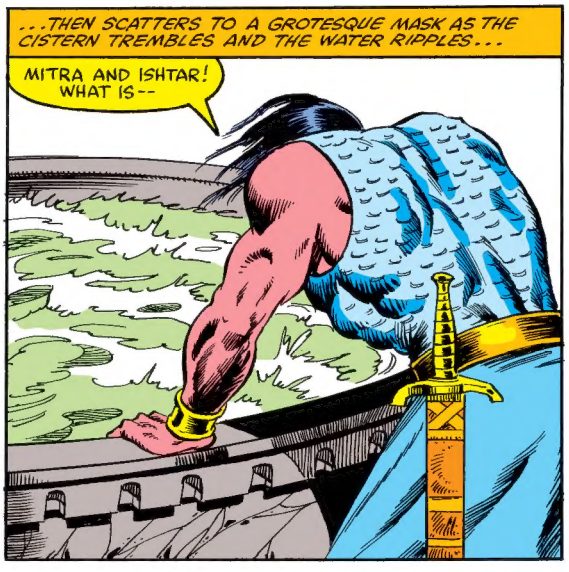
IF THERE'S ANY WAY I CAN HELP, FATHER...
NO, SON.
JUST RUN ALONG AND ESCORT YOUR MOTHER TO SUPPER--I'LL BE ALONG AFTER I WORRY THE MATTER A TRIFLE LONGER.


WATCHING HIS SON, THE KING SWELLS WITH PRIDE...
"IF THERE'S ANY WAY I CAN HELP, FATHER..."
BRIEFLY, HE SMILES.

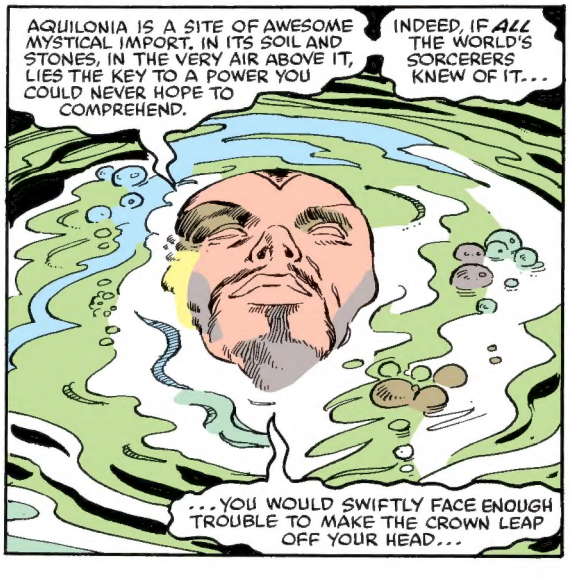
THEN HE SETS OFF, PACING TO BURN AWAY THE TENSIONS OF HIS MIND, MUTTERING DARKLY TO HIMSELF...
"HELP!" TRUTH IS, EVEN WITH ALL THE HELP OF CROM, MITRA, AND ISHTAR, THIS IS ONE PROBLEM THAT MIGHT NEVER BE SOLVED...

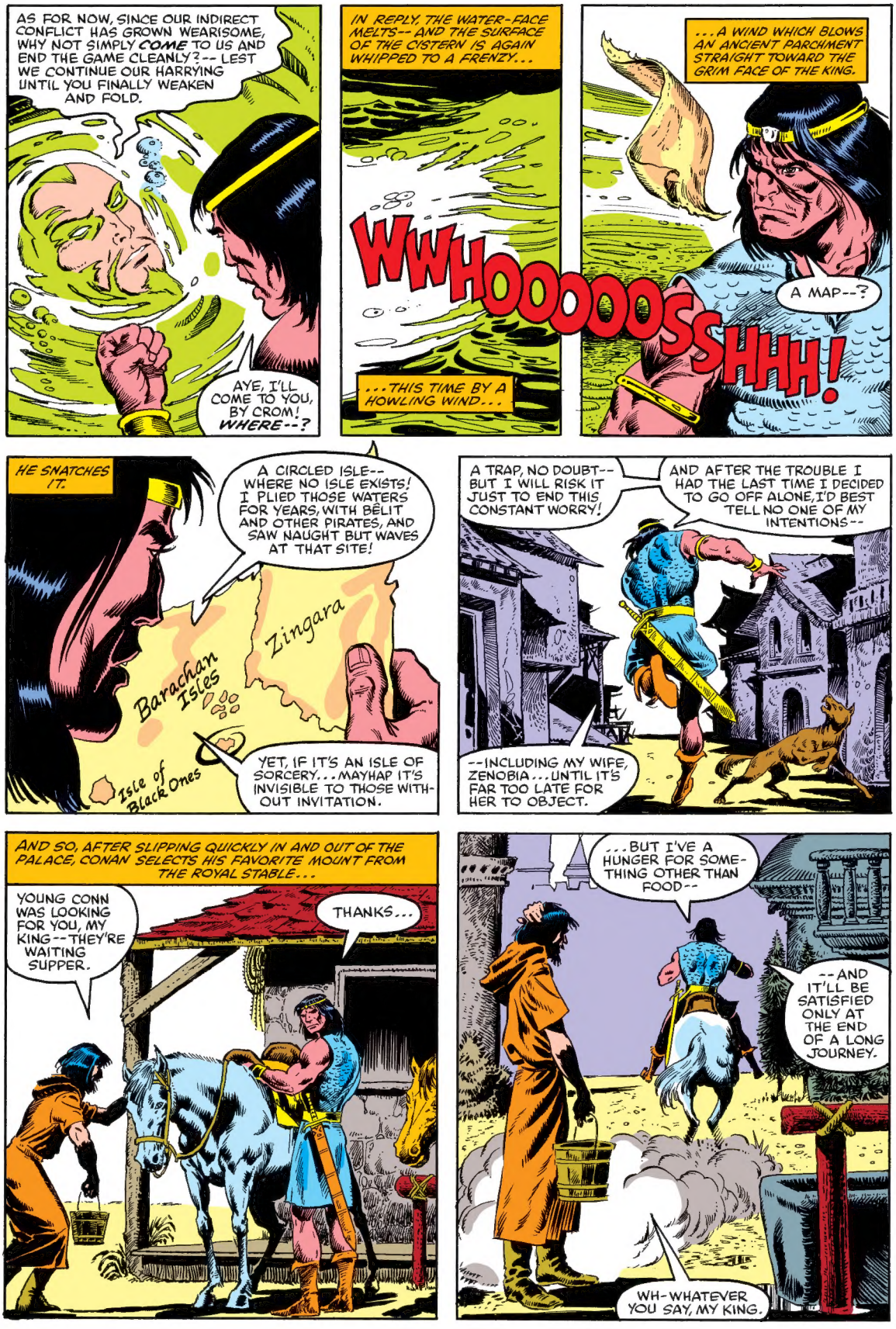

WORSE YET, MAYHAP IT'LL BE SOLVED AGAINST MY FAVOR-- WITH A DAGGER FINDING ITS FINAL HOME IN MY BACK!
IT IS NOT OFTEN THAT THE KING WALKS THIS POOR QUARTER OF THE CITY, AND THE PEOPLE HE PASSES STIFFEN WITH ASTONISHMENT... YET NO ONE SPEAKS, OR EVEN LOOKS TOO BOLDLY IN HIS DIRECTION...
...FOR CONAN'S TEMPER, AND HIS TOWERING STRENGTH, ARE LEGEND.

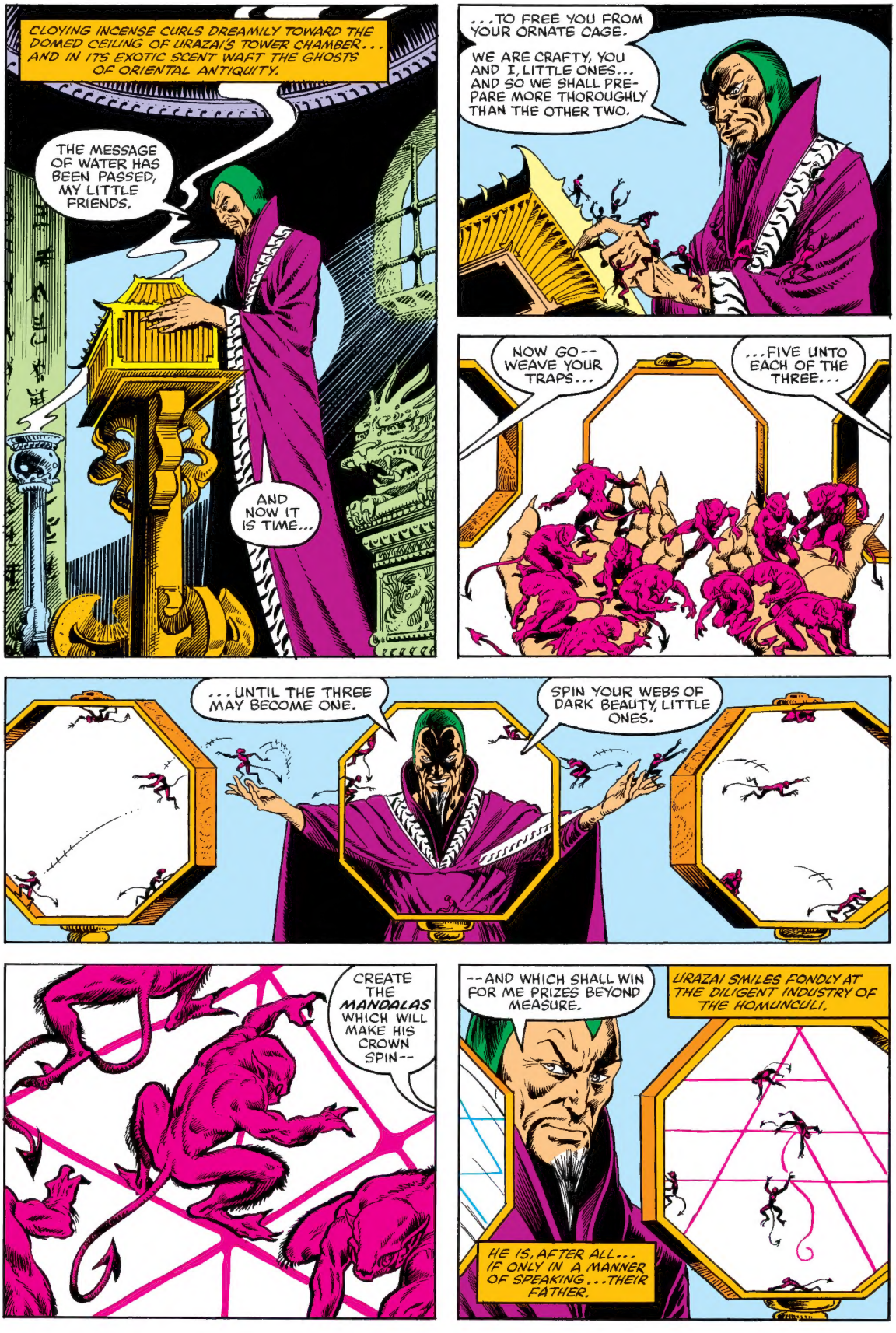

CROM CURSE ME-- OR LAUGH AT ME-- FOR DARING TO LUST AFTER THIS BINDING CROWN.
CROWNS ARE FOR STATUES OF DEAD MEN-- OR FOR LIVING FOOLS, SOON TO BE DEAD.
THE FACE IN THE CISTERN STARES BACK MOCKINGLY...


...THEN SCATTERS TO A GROTESQUE MASK AS THE CISTERN TREMBLES AND THE WATER RIPPLES...
MITRA AND ISHTAR! WHAT IS--

...FINALLY TO BE USURPED BY A NEW FACE.
KNOW, CONAN, THAT I AM URAZAI-- ONE OF THREE MAGES RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ATTEMPTS ON YOUR LIFE AND THRONE.
EH--?! BUT... BUT WHY?


AQUILONIA IS A SITE OF AWESOME MYSTICAL IMPORT. IN ITS SOIL AND STONES, IN THE VERY AIR ABOVE IT, LIES THE KEY TO A POWER YOU COULD NEVER HOPE TO COMPREHEND.
INDEED, IF ALL THE WORLD'S SORCERERS KNEW OF IT...
...YOU WOULD SWIFTLY FACE ENOUGH TROUBLE TO MAKE THE CROWN LEAP OFF YOUR HEAD...


AS FOR NOW, SINCE OUR INDIRECT CONFLICT HAS GROWN WEARISOME, WHY NOT SIMPLY COME TO US AND END THE GAME CLEANLY?-- LEST WE CONTINUE OUR HARRYING UNTIL YOU FINALLY WEAKEN AND FOLD.
AYE, I'LL COME TO YOU, BY CROM! WHERE--?
IN REPLY, THE WATER-FACE MELTS-- AND THE SURFACE OF THE CISTERN IS AGAIN WHIPPED TO A FRENZY...
WWHOOOOOOSSHHH!
...THIS TIME BY A HOWLING WIND...
...A WIND WHICH BLOWS AN ANCIENT PARCHMENT STRAIGHT TOWARD THE GRIM FACE OF THE KING.
A MAP--?
HE SNATCHES IT.
A CIRCLED ISLE-- WHERE NO ISLE EXISTS! I PLIED THOSE WATERS FOR YEARS, WITH BÊLIT AND OTHER PIRATES, AND SAW NAUGHT BUT WAVES AT THAT SITE!
Zingara
Barachan Isles
Isle of Black Ones
YET, IF IT'S AN ISLE OF SORCERY...MAYHAP IT'S INVISIBLE TO THOSE WITHOUT INVITATION.
A TRAP, NO DOUBT-- BUT I WILL RISK IT JUST TO END THIS CONSTANT WORRY!
AND AFTER THE TROUBLE I HAD THE LAST TIME I DECIDED TO GO OFF ALONE, I'D BEST TELL NO ONE OF MY INTENTIONS--
--INCLUDING MY WIFE, ZENOBIA...UNTIL IT'S FAR TOO LATE FOR HER TO OBJECT.
AND SO, AFTER SLIPPING QUICKLY IN AND OUT OF THE PALACE, CONAN SELECTS HIS FAVORITE MOUNT FROM THE ROYAL STABLE...
YOUNG CONN WAS LOOKING FOR YOU, MY KING--THEY'RE WAITING SUPPER.
THANKS...
...BUT I'VE A HUNGER FOR SOMETHING OTHER THAN FOOD--
--AND IT'LL BE SATISFIED ONLY AT THE END OF A LONG JOURNEY.
WH-WHATEVER YOU SAY, MY KING.

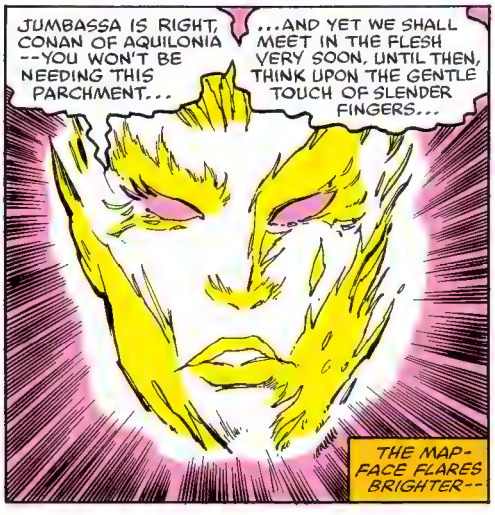

CLOYING INCENSE CURLS DREAMILY TOWARD THE DOMED CEILING OF URAZAI'S TOWER CHAMBER... AND IN ITS EXOTIC SCENT WAFT THE GHOSTS OF ORIENTAL ANTIQUITY.
THE MESSAGE OF WATER HAS BEEN PASSED, MY LITTLE FRIENDS.
AND NOW IT IS TIME...
...TO FREE YOU FROM YOUR ORNATE CAGE.
WE ARE CRAFTY, YOU AND I, LITTLE ONES... AND SO WE SHALL PREPARE MORE THOROUGHLY THAN THE OTHER TWO.
NOW GO-- WEAVE YOUR TRAPS...
...FIVE UNTO EACH OF THE THREE...
...UNTIL THE THREE MAY BECOME ONE.
SPIN YOUR WEBS OF DARK BEAUTY, LITTLE ONES.
CREATE THE MANDALAS WHICH WILL MAKE HIS CROWN SPIN--
--AND WHICH SHALL WIN FOR ME PRIZES BEYOND MEASURE.
URAZAI SMILES FONDLY AT THE DILIGENT INDUSTRY OF THE HOMUNCULI.
HE IS, AFTER ALL... IF ONLY IN A MANNER OF SPEAKING...THEIR FATHER.

SHAFTS OF STRONG EASTERN SUN BRIGHTEN QUEEN ZENOBIA'S MORNING BATH...
I WORRY ABOUT CONAN, SHAREEN-- HE WASN'T IN BED WHEN I AWOKE...
DO YOU KNOW WHERE HE COULD BE?
I AM SORRY, ZENOBIA, BUT I HAVE NOT SEEN THE KING SINCE--
EH--? MY QUEEN! A PARCHMENT IN YOUR BATH CRYSTALS...!
A PARCHMENT?
LET ME SEE THAT, SHAREEN... AND IF IT'S WHAT I THINK IT IS...
IT IS.
ZENOBIA-- GONE FISHING. BIG CATCH PLANNED. MAY BE GONE A WHILE-- DON'T WORRY. CONAN
CURSE HIS THICK BARBARIAN HIDE!!
FETCH TROCERO AND PROSPERO AT ONCE, SHAREEN-- AND INFORM THEM THAT THE KINGDOM IS ONCE AGAIN WITHOUT ITS KING!
A-AT ONCE, ZENOBIA-- I WILL DO AS YOU SAY.

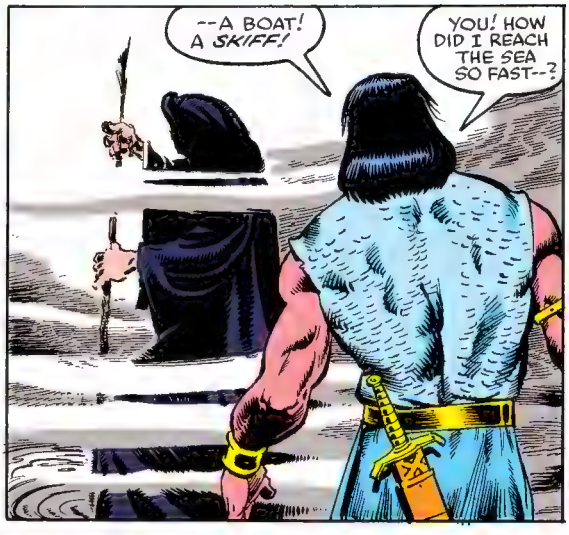
THAT NIGHT, IN THE SOUTHEASTERN QUARTER OF THE CITY, SKULKING FIGURES SHUFFLE THROUGH SHADOWS...
I STILL DON'T SEE WHY WE HAVE TO HIDE THEM.
WEAPONS ARE FOR THE SPILLING OF BLOOD--NOT FOR STORAGE IN SOME FOUL CELLAR!
AYE--PATIENCE, THEY COUNSEL... BUT HOW LONG WILL WE HAVE TO WAIT BEFORE MOVING ON THAT CURSED BARBARIAN KING?
MOREOVER AND MORE IMPORTANTLY, MY FRIEND, HOW LONG WILL WE HAVE TO WAIT BEFORE OUR NEXT PAYMENT?
STILL, THEY'VE PAID US WELL THUS FAR...
...SO I GUESS WE'LL JUST HAVE TO WAIT UNTIL--
THREE DAYS AT THE LEAST, REBELS, AND FIVE AT THE MOST. HASTEN YOUR PREPARATIONS FOR THE REBELLION.
IT...IT'S THEM--FORMING FROM THE WALL!
BUT ALREADY THE FACES BEGIN TO FADE, BLENDING INTO PITTED STONE.
AND AT THAT MOMENT, FAR TO THE SOUTH...
CROM CURSE ME FOR BEING AN IMPATIENT FOOL!
I'VE RIDDEN YOU NIGH UNTO DEATH, HAVEN'T I? BUT YOUR PACE, AT LEAST, HAS BOUGHT YOU FREEDOM--YOU'RE NO USE TO ME NOW.
WITH LUCK, YOU'LL RECOVER YOUR STRENGTH IN A DAY OR SO, AND GRAZE YOUR WAY BACK HOME...

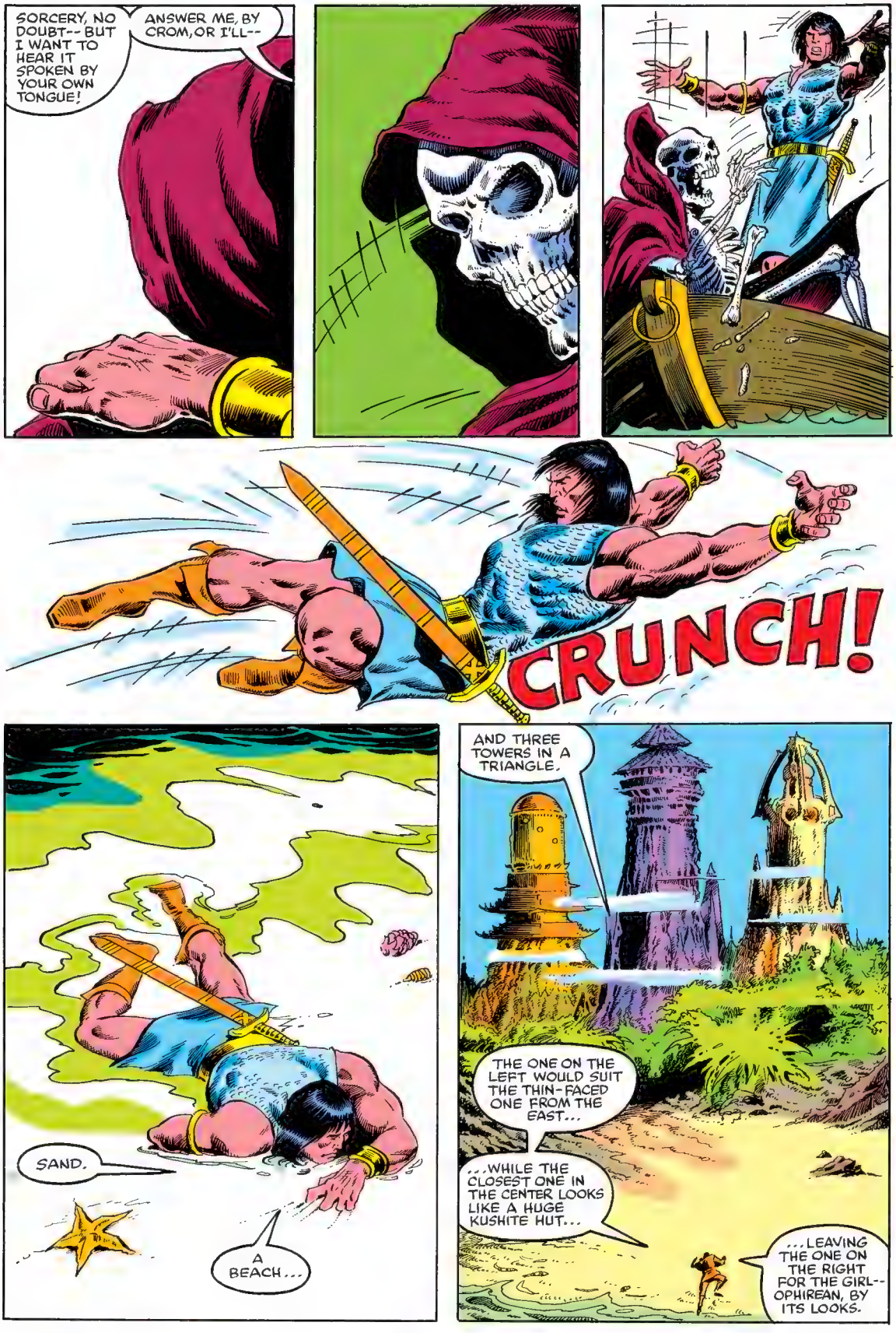
AS FOR ME, ON FOOT... FOOL THAT I AM... IT'LL TAKE WEEKS JUST TO REACH THE SEA...
...THEN DAYS MORE BEFORE I COME WITHIN SIGHT OF THIS NONEXISTENT ISLE!
NOT SO, BARBARIAN KING.
EH--?!
LIKE YOU, WE HAVE SHORT PATIENCE FOR LONG JOURNEYS.
INDEED, URAZAI EXCEEDED HIS AUTHORITY THE MOMENT HE PRESENTED YOU WITH THAT MAP...

MITRA AND ISHTAR!


JUMBASSA IS RIGHT, CONAN OF AQUILONIA --YOU WON'T BE NEEDING THIS PARCHMENT...
...AND YET WE SHALL MEET IN THE FLESH VERY SOON, UNTIL THEN, THINK UPON THE GENTLE TOUCH OF SLENDER FINGERS...
THE MAP-FACE FLARES BRIGHTER--

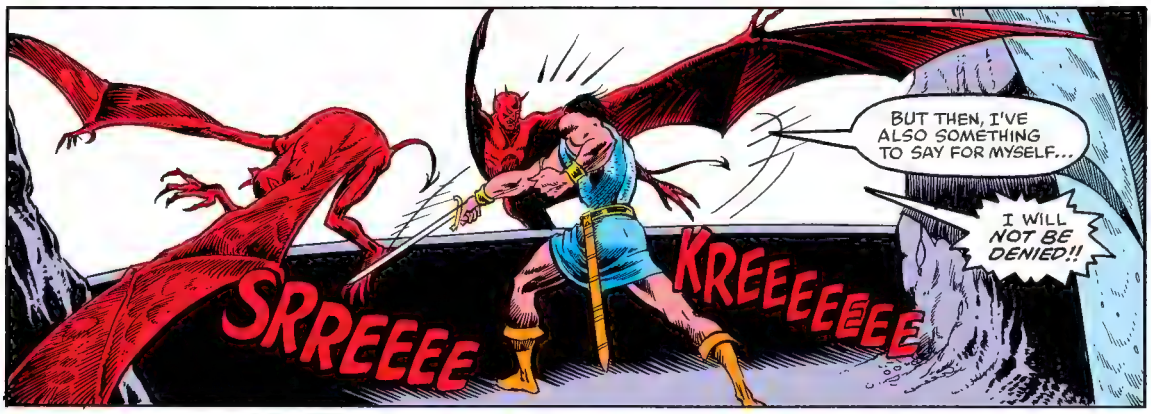
--AND IS THEN SUCKED AWAY AT TREMENDOUS SPEED, STOLEN BY A SUDDEN SWIRL OF GHOSTLY FOG.
I'VE SEEN ALL THREE OF THEM NOW--THE THIN-FACED ONE IN THE WATER, THE BROAD-FACED KUSHITE IN THE DIRT... AND THE WOMAN OF FLAME.
I EVEN KNOW THEIR NAMES AND--
EH--? THE GROUND-- PITCHING AND YAWING UNDER MY FEET ...LIKE A--

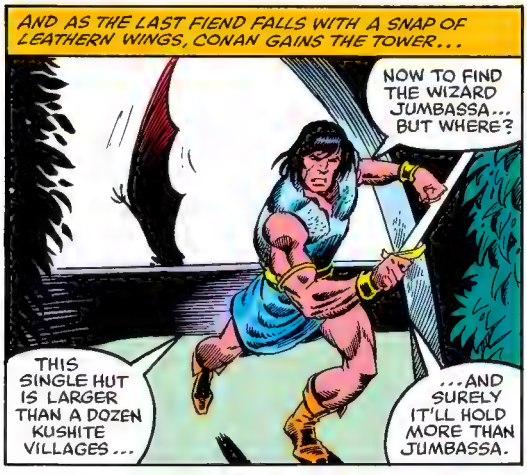

--A BOAT! A SKIFF!
YOU! HOW DID I REACH THE SEA SO FAST--?

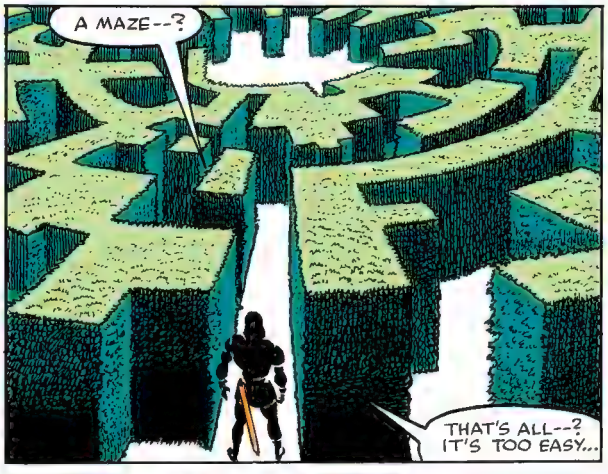

SORCERY, NO DOUBT-- BUT I WANT TO HEAR IT SPOKEN BY YOUR OWN TONGUE!
ANSWER ME, BY CROM, OR I'LL--
CRUNCH!
SAND.
A BEACH...
AND THREE TOWERS IN A TRIANGLE.
THE ONE ON THE LEFT WOULD SUIT THE THIN-FACED ONE FROM THE EAST...
...WHILE THE CLOSEST ONE IN THE CENTER LOOKS LIKE A HUGE KUSHITE HUT...
...LEAVING THE ONE ON THE RIGHT FOR THE GIRL-- OPHIREAN, BY ITS LOOKS.

THEN THE ISLE EXISTS -- AND BY THEIR MAGICKS I'VE REACHED IT.
STILL A TRAP, NO DOUBT, BUT AT LEAST NOW I -- MY EYES!
THE RISING SUN AT HIS BACK REACHES THE BEATEN GOLD OF URAZAI'S TOWER DOME, DAZZLING BACK LIKE SPEARS OF FIRE.
CAN'T SEE A THING UNTIL THESE CURSED SPOTS FADE...
GRRRRRRRRRR
STRONG SHAPES MOVING ALMOST SILENTLY -- SAVE FOR THEIR OCCASIONAL GROWLS.
NOTHING TO DO BUT HACK IN EVERY DIRECTION I SENSE MOVE-MENT...
BUT WHAT ARE THEY? DEMONS? LIONS --?
AYE -- THEY'RE LIONS, TRUE TO THEIR SOUND!
I CAN SEE THEM NOW!
BUT I, MYSELF, WAS ONCE CALLED AMRA THE LION...
...A NAME I SHALL NOW MORE THAN LIVE UP TO!

A WASTE OF TIME-- I CAME HERE TO TRADE BLOWS WITH SORCERY, NOT NATURAL BEASTS!
STILL, THE SORCERY WILL COME SOON ENOUGH--
--WHEN I ATTACK THE CLOSEST TOWER!
REACHING THE FIRST OF THE THREE TOWERS, CONAN BEGINS CLIMBING WITH THE SURE STRENGTH AND SWIFT EASE OF THE CIMMERIAN HILLMAN HE IS...
ZENOBIA AND TROCERO WOULD FAULT MY TACTICS, NO DOUBT, AS BEING TOO DIRECT...BUT CROM KNOWS I'M GETTING TOO OLD TO WASTE TIME ON DEVIOUS PLANNING.
BEST TO JUST GET IT OVER WITH--AND NOT REST UNTIL I'VE SEEN THE THIRD AND FINAL WIZARD'S HEAD BOUNCE ON THE GROUND-- SO I CAN RETURN TO MY WIFE AND SON WITH MY MIND FREED OF WORRY.
HMP. I WONDER IF ZENOBIA FOUND MY MESSAGE IN HER BATH CRYS--
SHREEEE
CROM'S BLOOD! NOW THEY HURL WINGED FIENDS AT ME!
I'VE GOT MY SIGHT FULLY BACK...
...BUT NOW I'VE A HANDI-CAP OF ONE ARM...
...AND NO FEET.
AAIIEEEE
I'LL SAY THIS MUCH FOR YOUR VILE MASTERS...
THEY'RE HARDLY MAKING THE DIRECT APPROACH EASY!


SRREEEE
KREEEEEEEE
BUT THEN, I'VE ALSO SOMETHING TO SAY FOR MYSELF...
I WILL NOT BE DENIED!!


AND AS THE LAST FIEND FALLS WITH A SNAP OF LEATHERN WINGS, CONAN GAINS THE TOWER...
NOW TO FIND THE WIZARD JUMBASSA... BUT WHERE?
THIS SINGLE HUT IS LARGER THAN A DOZEN KUSHITE VILLAGES...
...AND SURELY IT'LL HOLD MORE THAN JUMBASSA.


A MAZE--?
THAT'S ALL--? IT'S TOO EASY...

SURELY A WIZARD WOULD BLOCK MY PATH WITH MORE THAN LIONS, INEFFECTUAL WINGED CREATURES, AND CRAZILY CUT SHRUBS...
CAUTIOUSLY, CONAN ENTERS THE MAZE AT ITS NEAREST OPENING, TURNING ITS VERDANT CORNERS FIRST THIS WAY, THEN THAT...

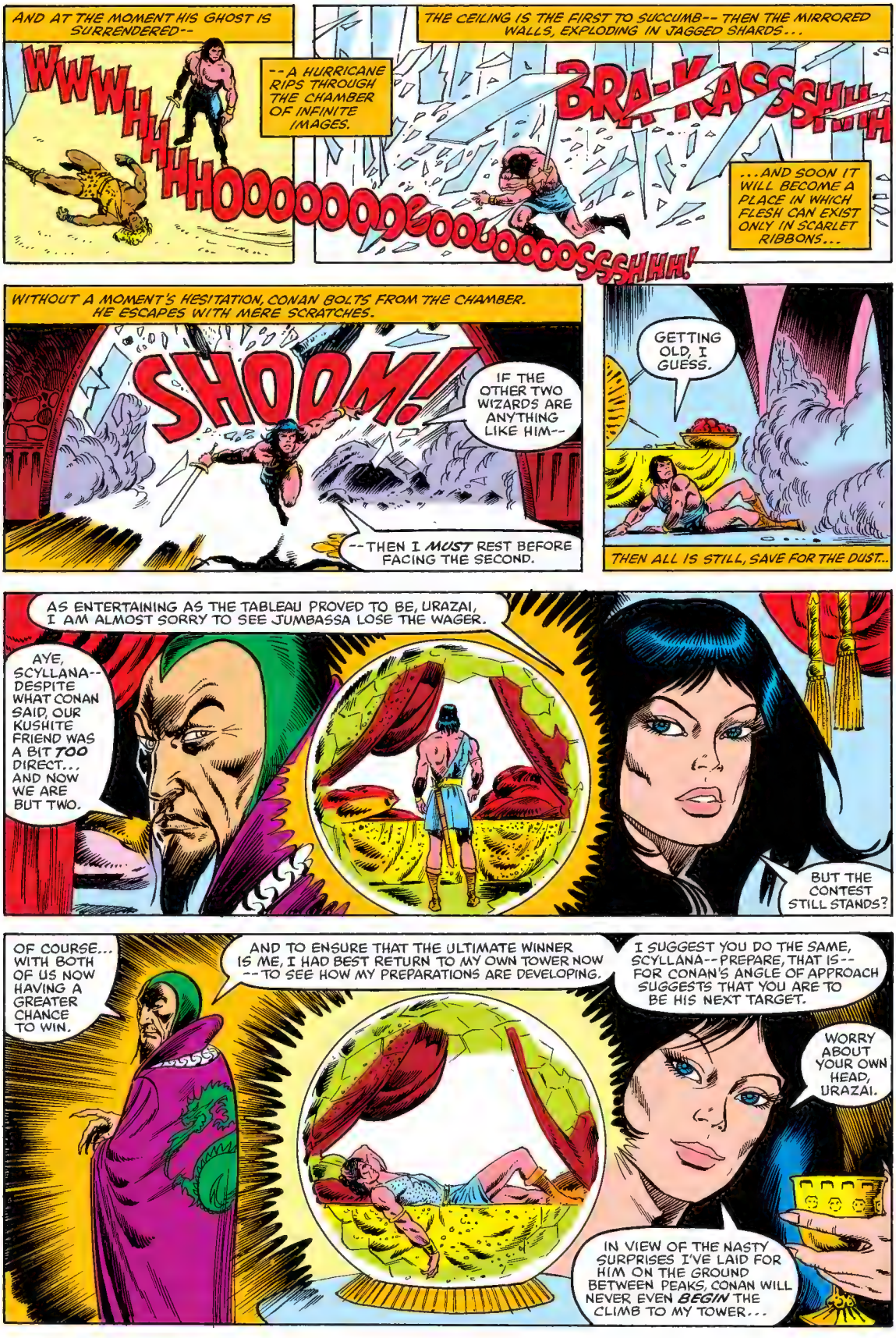
...UNTIL--
IT WAS TOO EASY. THERE IS NO WAY OUT OF THE MAZE. IT LEADS TO NAUGHT BUT DEAD-ENDS.
A TRICK, THEN... A TRAP.
BUT WHAT AWAITS TO SPRING THE TRAP SHUT--?

KUSHITE BLOOD-DRINKERS!
CANNIBAL VAMPIRES!

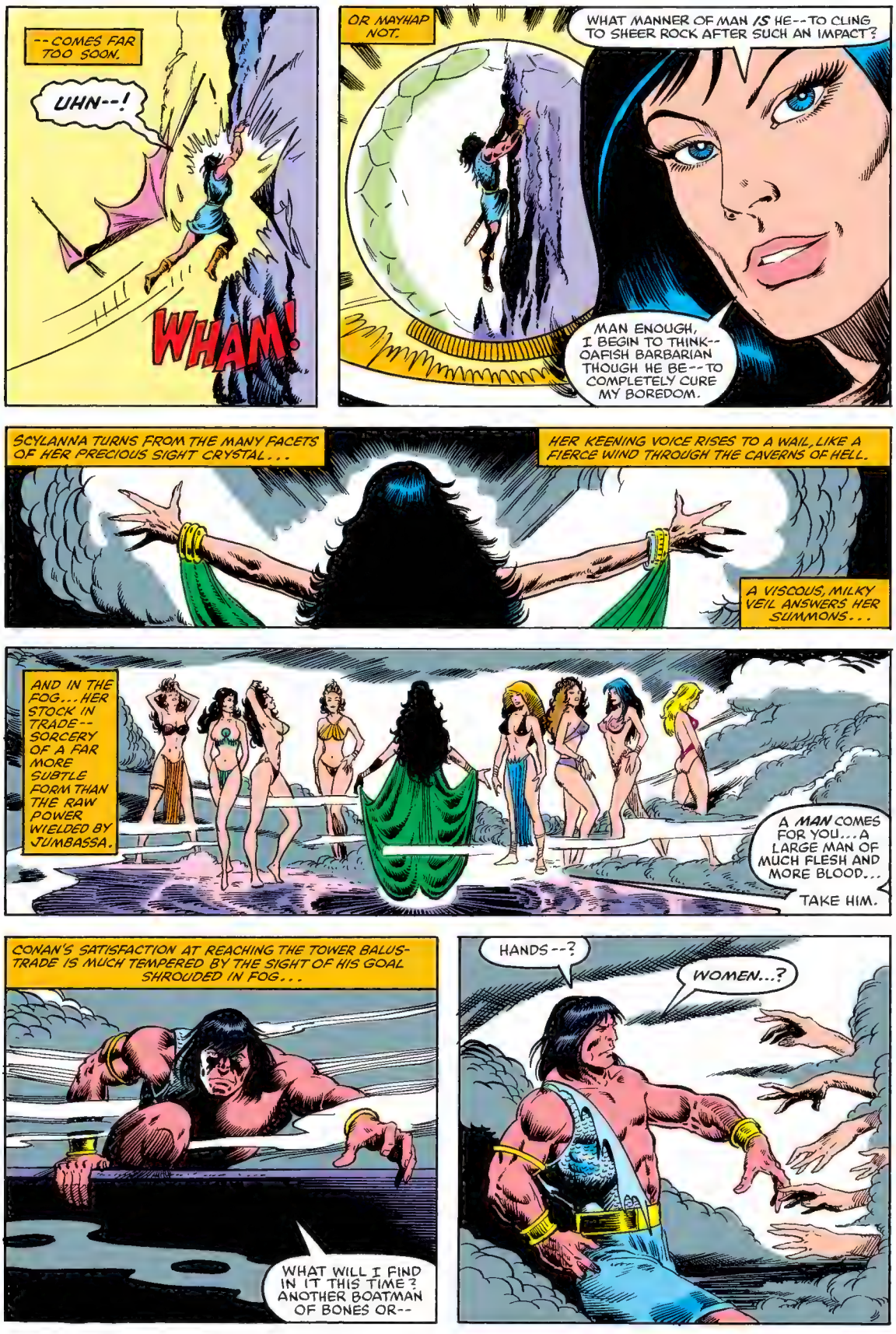
THEY SWARM OVER HIM, STRAINING FOR HIS FLESH AND BLOOD WITH CRACKED TALONS AND SHARP FANGS...
HE SUFFERS A DOZEN PAINFUL WOUNDS --BUT STILL HE WHIRLS AND SLASHES, UNTIL HIS BROADSWORD HUMS THROUGH A SCARLET MIST...
AND WHEN THE LAST ONE HAS CRUMPLED INTO THE GREATER SPRAWL, THE ENTIRE HEAP SHIMMERS...AND FADES.
THEN I HAVE BEEN FIGHTING SORCERY... ALL ALONG.
EVEN THE LIONS FADED, NO DOUBT, AS SOON AS I TURNED AWAY FROM THEM.
NOW, AS FOR THIS CURSED MAZE...
...IT'S TIME I RETURNED TO THE DIRECT APPROACH...
...UNTIL I'VE CUT MY WAY THROUGH IT!
A FLURRY OF SHREDDED LEAVES...
...AND DEAD-END BECOMES DARK ENTRANCE-WAY...
DARK, THAT IS, UNTIL CONAN ENTERS--
--TRIGGERING LIGHTS WHICH STARTLE HIM WITH MYRIAD IMAGES OF HIMSELF.
MIRRORS--?!
BUT WHY? HOW CAN MERE LOOKING GLASS HARM ANY-ONE?

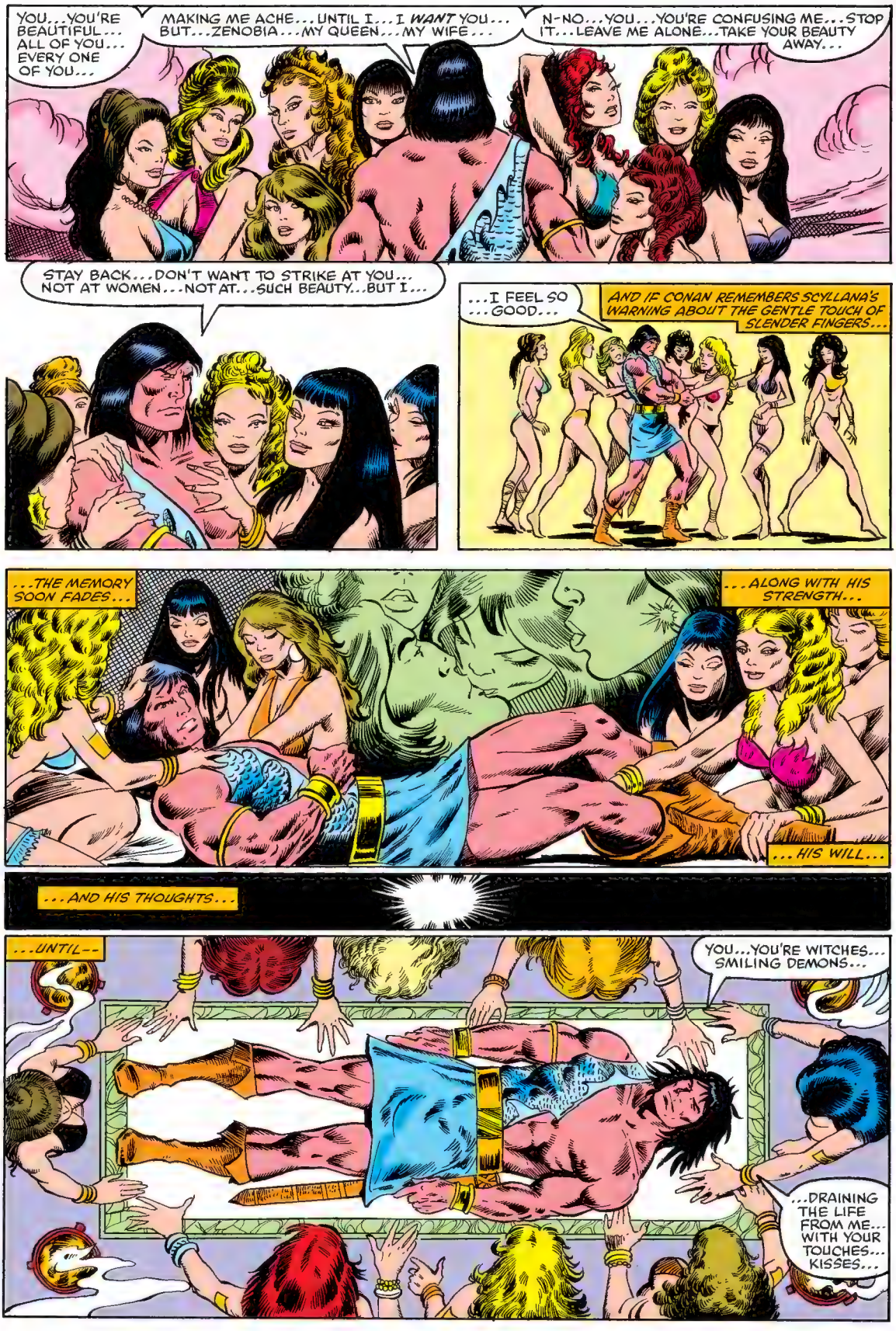
AGH-H!
LIGHTNING--BOUNCING OFF THE GLASS--RIPPING AT ME!
NO--NOT LIGHTNING--BUT SORCEROUS ENERGY!
RAW BOLTS OF NAKED MAGICKAL POWER!
INDEED, BARBARIAN KING...FOR, LIKE YOU, I PREFER THE DIRECT APPROACH.
MY MAGICKING IS NEVER DEVIOUS, NOR EVEN ORNATE IN ITS STYLE OR CONSTRUCTS...
IT IS SIMPLY... DEVASTATING.
THEREFORE, BARBARIAN KING, PREPARE YOURSELF TO BE DEVASTATED!
AND JUMBASSA'S MAGIC RIPPLES AND REBOUNDS THROUGH THE HALL OF MIRRORS, UNTIL THE ENTIRE CHAMBER IS LIKE THE SIZZLING HEART OF A STORM.
BURNED AND BENUMBED, VAINLY TRYING TO PARRY THE THOUSAND QUICK-SILVER FLASHES...
...CONAN IS DRIVEN BACK, EVER BACK, UNTIL HIS SHOULDER FINALLY SLAMS INTO THE NOW-WARM SURFACE OF A MIRROR.
THEN HE RECALLS THE ONLY TWO ELEMENTS HOLDING THE POWER TO COUNTER SORCERY--FIRE AND SILVER...
AND WHAT ARE MIRRORS, IF NOT GLASS WITH SILVER BACKING?
HE WRENCHES ONE FREE...

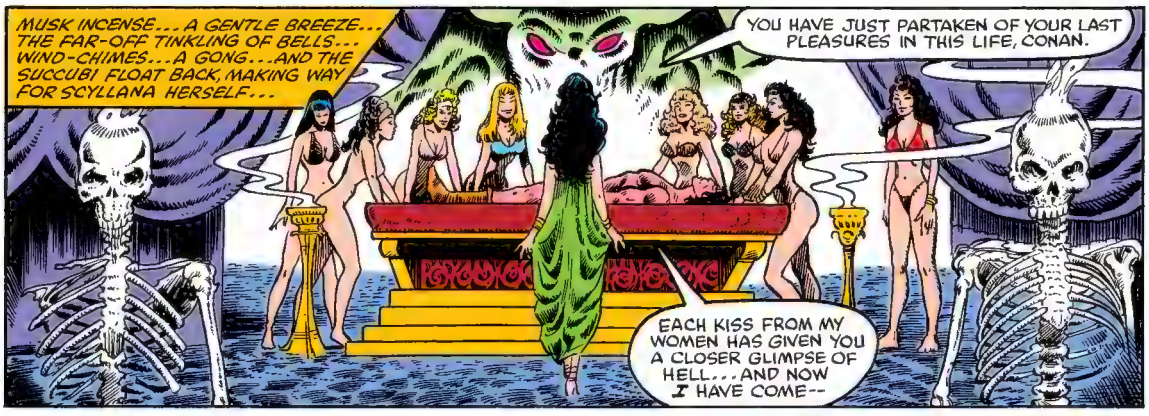
...AND TWISTS ITS BACKING OF SILVER TOWARD THE CORRUSCATING ONSLAUGHT.
NOW, JUMBASSA...
...LET US FIGHT ON EQUAL TERMS!
NO--! YOU FOOL! IN YOUR BLIND GROPING FOR A SHIELD, YOU...
...YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'VE DONE!
I CAN GUESS.
THE SILVER PANICS YOU, EH?
YOUR MAGICK IS USELESS AGAINST IT.
AYE... BUT THE SILVERED SHIELD, YOU SEE, DOES NOTHING TO DAMPEN THE IMPACT OF--
--MY SWORD!
SEEING THAT THE WIZARD IS NOW TOO CONFUSED AND WOUNDED TO EMPLOY HIS SORCERY, CONAN DROPS BOTH SHIELD AND BLADE...
...THE BETTER TO LOCK HIS BARE HANDS AROUND JUMBASSA'S THROAT...TO FIGHT THE WAY HE KNOWS BEST!
IT WILL END NOW IN THE MANNER OF RAGING, SNARLING BEASTS...
...AND IT WILL BE DECIDED BY ONE FACTOR ALONE-- RAW STRENGTH.
AFTER LONG MOMENTS OF GRUNTING, TREMBLING EFFORT, THERE COMES THE FLESH-DULLED CRACK OF VERTEBRAE... AND A LAST GUSHING OF POWER FROM JUMBASSA'S EYES...
IF YOU HAD TRULY PREFERRED THE DIRECT APPROACH, JUMBASSA, YOU WOULD HAVE RELIED ON NO MAGICKS... PLAIN OR FANCY.
THE KUSHITE DIES.


AND AT THE MOMENT HIS GHOST IS SURRENDERED--
WWWHHHHHOOO

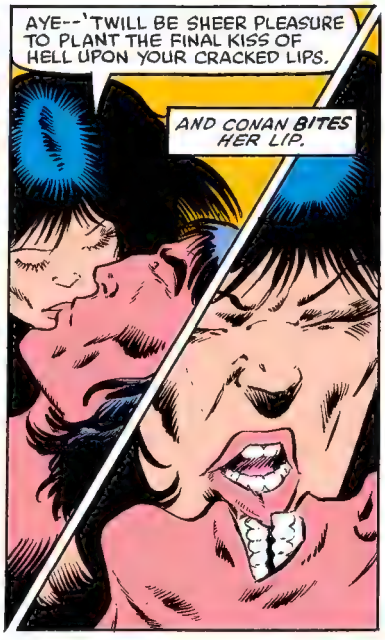
BUT THE DAWN FINDS CONAN REFRESHED AND EAGER TO RENEW HIS DIRECT TACTICS...
DENSE JUNGLE BETWEEN HERE AND THE OPHIREAN SORCERESS' TOWER...
TOO MUCH TIME AND TROUBLE ON FOOT. JUMBASSA WILL HARDLY MISS A FEW STICKS OF FURNITURE AND A FEW SHREDS OF TAPESTRY...
SOON...
NOW...
...LET'S HOPE THERE'S AN UPDRAFT...
THERE ISN'T.
THERE IS, HOWEVER, ONE OF SCYLLANA'S "NASTY SURPRISES" WAITING AT THE BOTTOM OF HIS PLUMMET...
FINALLY--AN UPDRAFT...!
AND NOT A MOMENT TOO SOON, BY CROM...
THE STENCH OF THE MONSTER'S BREATH ALONE WAS ENOUGH TO FINISH ME!
AND YET, CONAN'S HEAVY SIGH OF RELIEF--

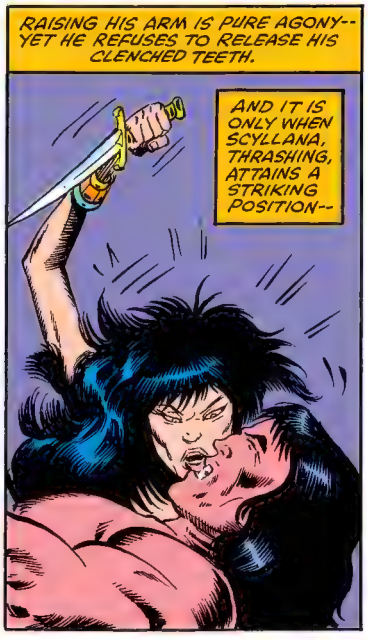

--COMES FAR TOO SOON.
UHN--!
WHAM!
OR MAYHAP NOT.
WHAT MANNER OF MAN IS HE--TO CLING TO SHEER ROCK AFTER SUCH AN IMPACT?
MAN ENOUGH, I BEGIN TO THINK--OAFISH BARBARIAN THOUGH HE BE--TO COMPLETELY CURE MY BOREDOM.
SCYLANNA TURNS FROM THE MANY FACETS OF HER PRECIOUS SIGHT CRYSTAL...
HER KEENING VOICE RISES TO A WAIL, LIKE A FIERCE WIND THROUGH THE CAVERNS OF HELL.
A VISCOUS, MILKY VEIL ANSWERS HER SUMMONS...
AND IN THE FOG...HER STOCK IN TRADE--SORCERY OF A FAR MORE SUBTLE FORM THAN THE RAW POWER WIELDED BY JUMBASSA.
A MAN COMES FOR YOU...A LARGE MAN OF MUCH FLESH AND MORE BLOOD...
TAKE HIM.
CONAN'S SATISFACTION AT REACHING THE TOWER BALUSTRADE IS MUCH TEMPERED BY THE SIGHT OF HIS GOAL SHROUDED IN FOG...
WHAT WILL I FIND IN IT THIS TIME? ANOTHER BOATMAN OF BONES OR--
HANDS--?
WOMEN...?

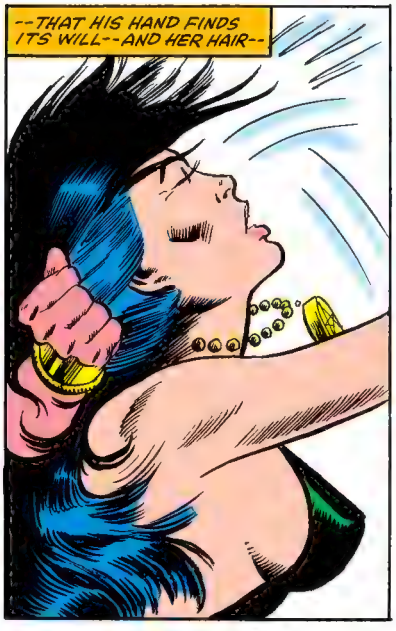

YOU...YOU'RE BEAUTIFUL... ALL OF YOU... EVERY ONE OF YOU...
MAKING ME ACHE...UNTIL I...I WANT YOU... BUT...ZENOBIA...MY QUEEN...MY WIFE...
N-NO...YOU...YOU'RE CONFUSING ME...STOP IT...LEAVE ME ALONE...TAKE YOUR BEAUTY AWAY...
STAY BACK...DON'T WANT TO STRIKE AT YOU... NOT AT WOMEN...NOT AT...SUCH BEAUTY...BUT I...
...I FEEL SO ...GOOD...
AND IF CONAN REMEMBERS SCYLLANA'S WARNING ABOUT THE GENTLE TOUCH OF SLENDER FINGERS...
...THE MEMORY SOON FADES...
...ALONG WITH HIS STRENGTH...
...HIS WILL...
...AND HIS THOUGHTS...
...UNTIL--
YOU...YOU'RE WITCHES... SMILING DEMONS...
...DRAINING THE LIFE FROM ME... WITH YOUR TOUCHES... KISSES...

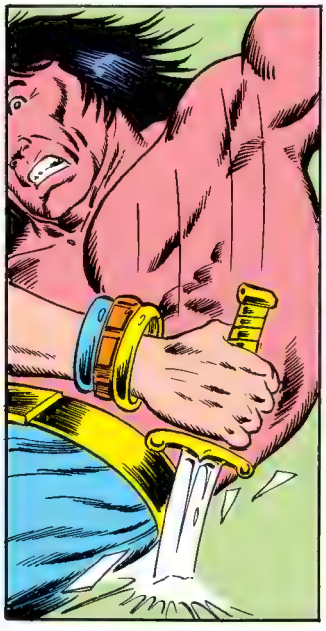

MUSK INCENSE... A GENTLE BREEZE... THE FAR-OFF TINKLING OF BELLS... WIND-CHIMES... A GONG... AND THE SUCCUBI FLOAT BACK, MAKING WAY FOR SCYLLANA HERSELF...
YOU HAVE JUST PARTAKEN OF YOUR LAST PLEASURES IN THIS LIFE, CONAN.
EACH KISS FROM MY WOMEN HAS GIVEN YOU A CLOSER GLIMPSE OF HELL... AND NOW I HAVE COME--

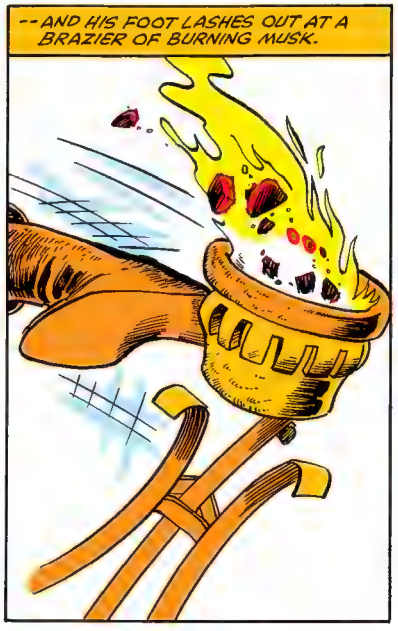
--TO DRIVE HOME THE POINT AND OPEN YOUR EYES FOR-EVER.
WAIT... YOUR HELLIONS WERE NOT ENOUGH FOR ME... ONE LAST KISS, WITCH-WOMAN... FROM YOU...

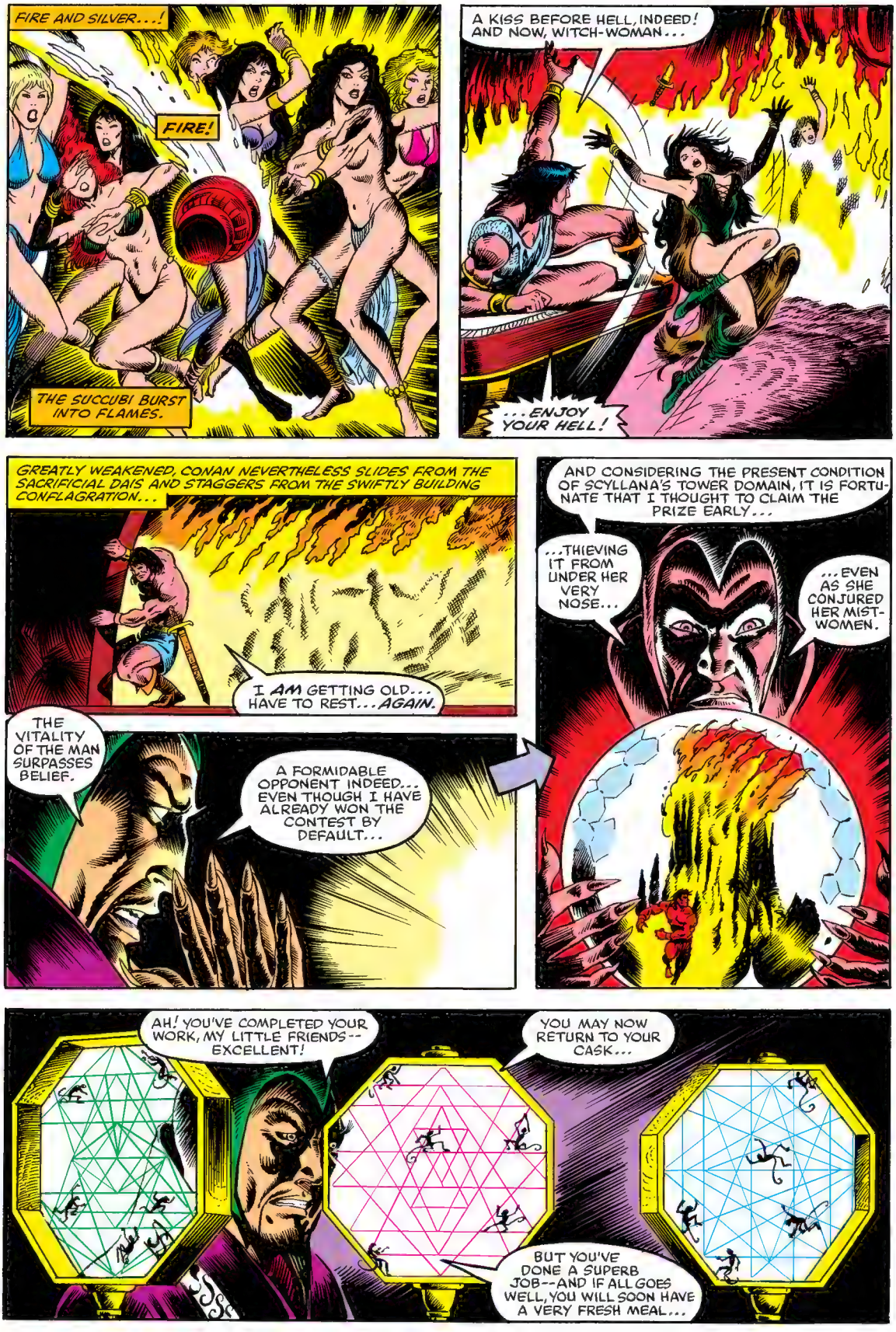

AYE--'TWILL BE SHEER PLEASURE TO PLANT THE FINAL KISS OF HELL UPON YOUR CRACKED LIPS.
AND CONAN BITES HER LIP.


RAISING HIS ARM IS PURE AGONY-- YET HE REFUSES TO RELEASE HIS CLENCHED TEETH.
AND IT IS ONLY WHEN SCYLLANA, THRASHING, ATTAINS A STRIKING POSITION--


--THAT HIS HAND FINDS ITS WILL--AND HER HAIR--

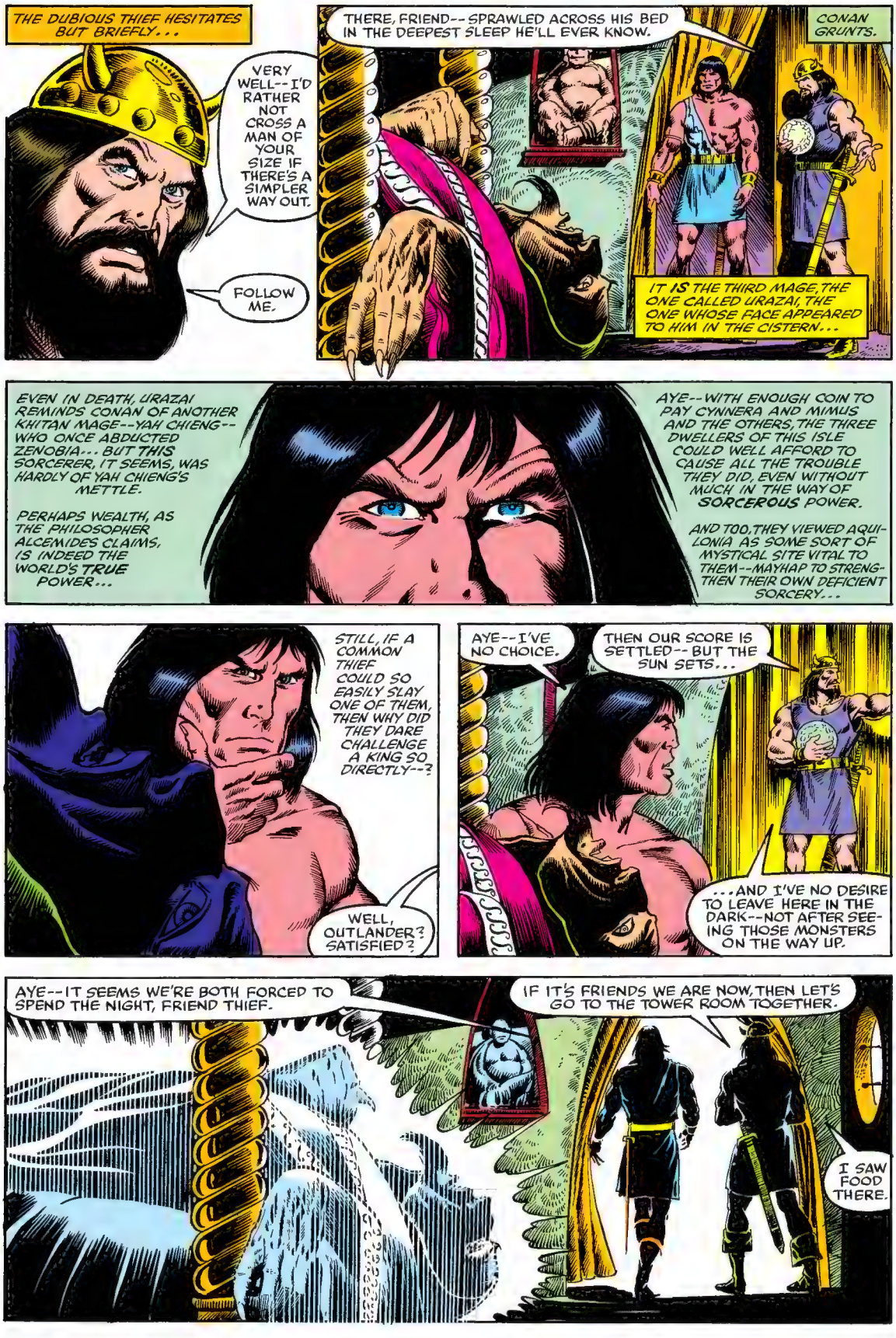


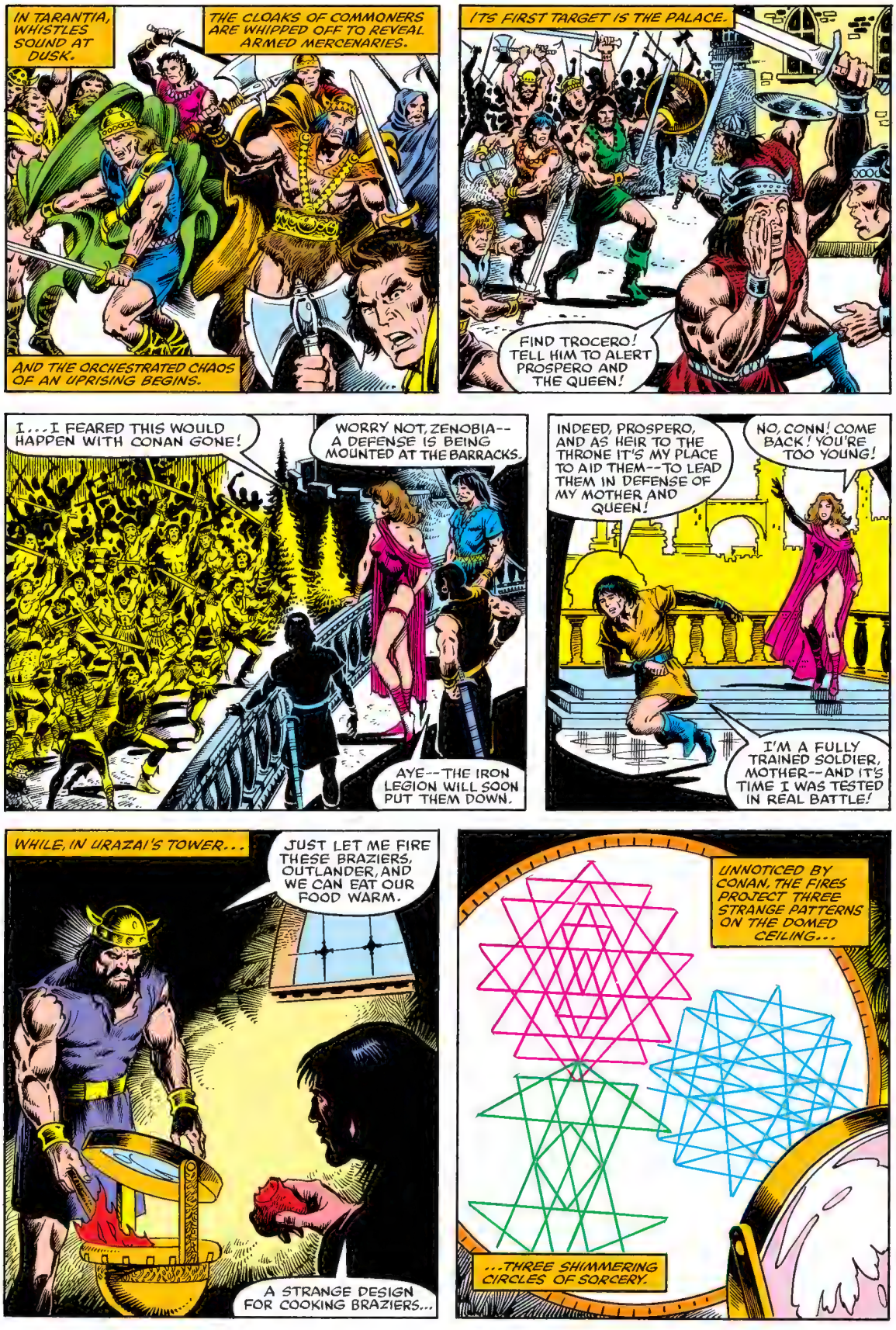

--AND HIS FOOT LASHES OUT AT A BRAZIER OF BURNING MUSK.

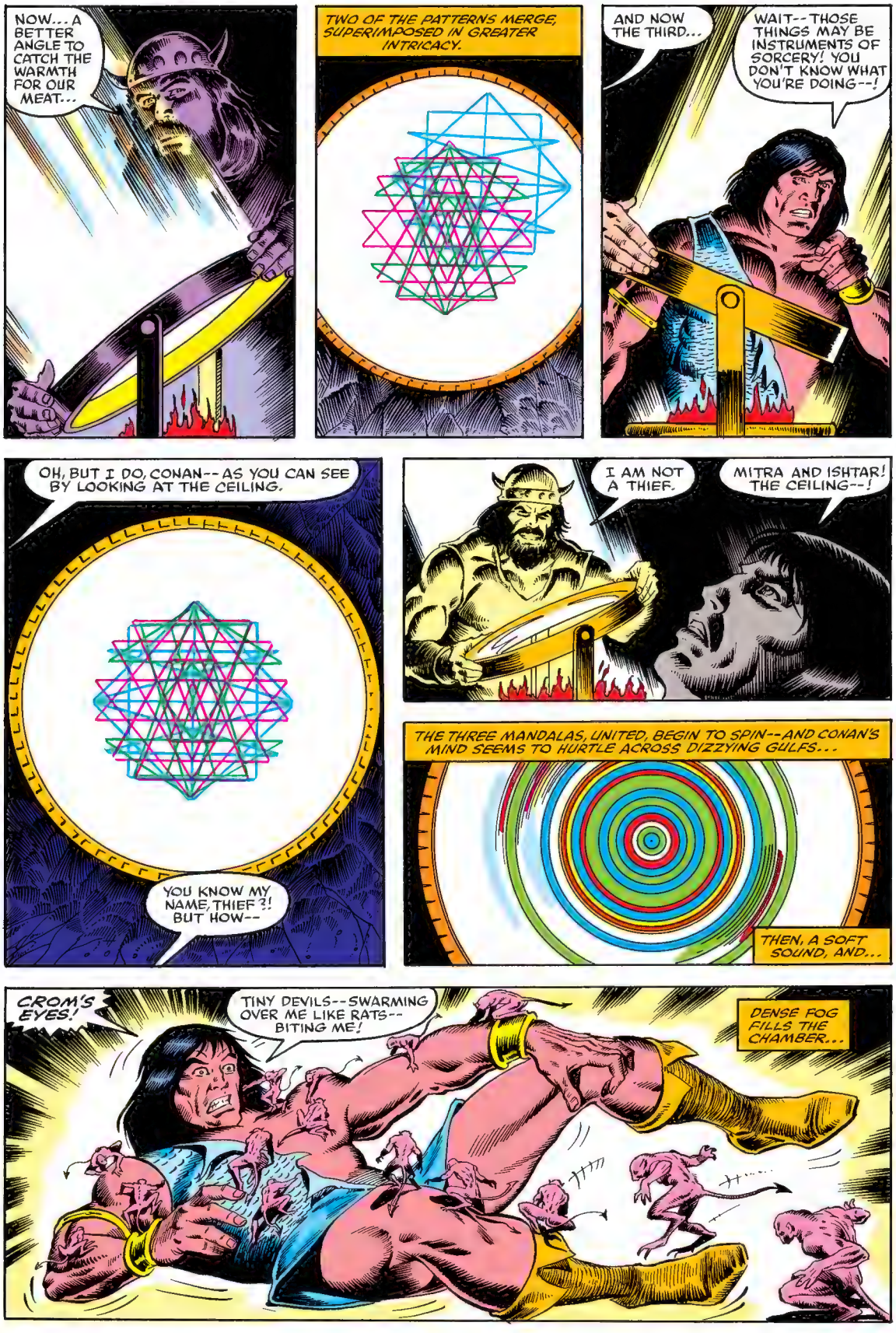

FIRE AND SILVER...!
FIRE!
THE SUCCUBI BURST INTO FLAMES.
A KISS BEFORE HELL, INDEED! AND NOW, WITCH-WOMAN...
...ENJOY YOUR HELL!
GREATLY WEAKENED, CONAN NEVERTHELESS SLIDES FROM THE SACRIFICIAL DAIS AND STAGGERS FROM THE SWIFTLY BUILDING CONFLAGRATION...
I AM GETTING OLD... HAVE TO REST... AGAIN.
AND CONSIDERING THE PRESENT CONDITION OF SCYLLANA'S TOWER DOMAIN, IT IS FORTUNATE THAT I THOUGHT TO CLAIM THE PRIZE EARLY...
...THIEVING IT FROM UNDER HER VERY NOSE...
...EVEN AS SHE CONJURED HER MIST-WOMEN.
THE VITALITY OF THE MAN SURPASSES BELIEF.
A FORMIDABLE OPPONENT INDEED... EVEN THOUGH I HAVE ALREADY WON THE CONTEST BY DEFAULT...
AH! YOU'VE COMPLETED YOUR WORK, MY LITTLE FRIENDS-- EXCELLENT!
YOU MAY NOW RETURN TO YOUR CASK...
BUT YOU'VE DONE A SUPERB JOB--AND IF ALL GOES WELL, YOU WILL SOON HAVE A VERY FRESH MEAL...

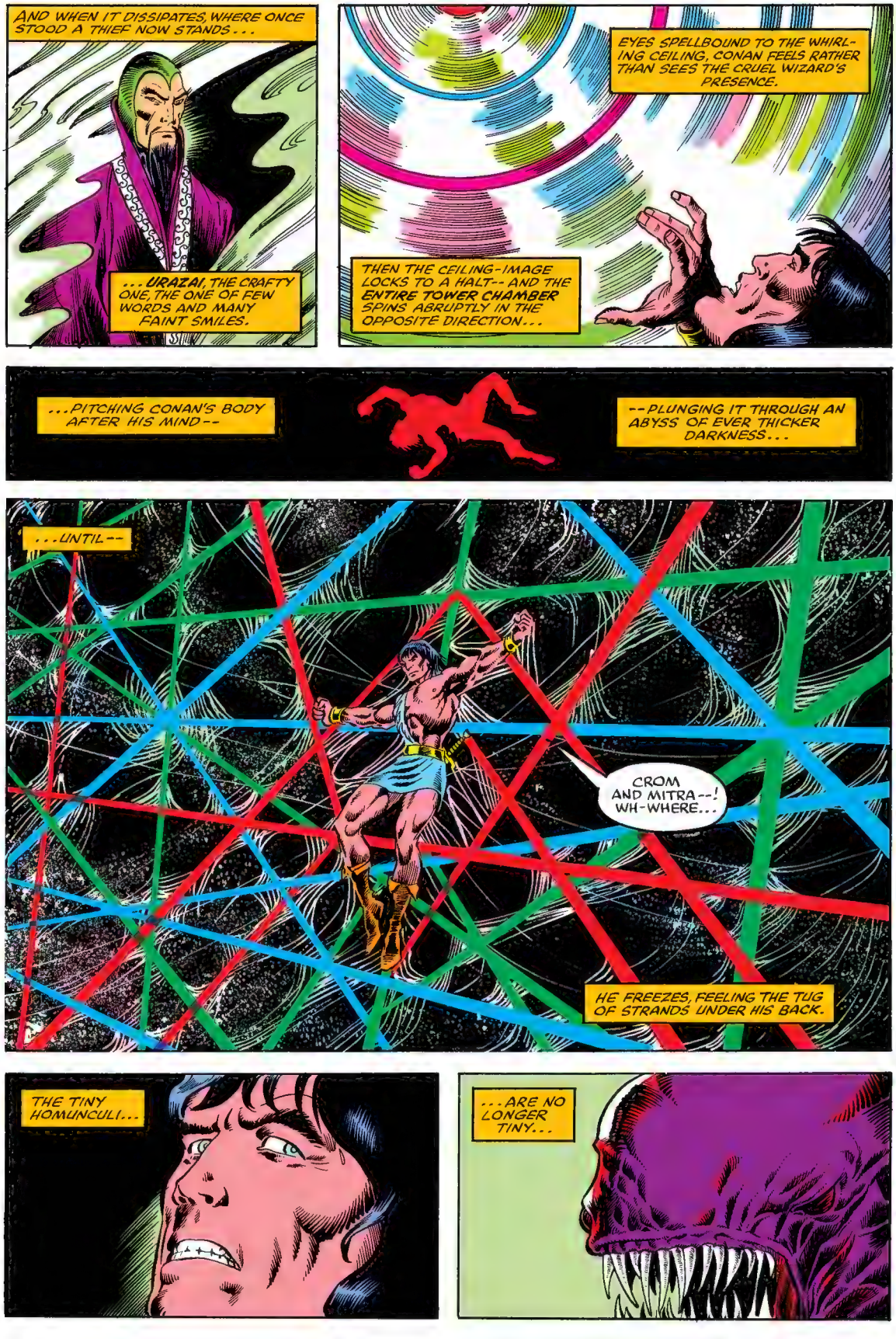
OBEDIENTLY, THE TINY HOMUNCULI SKITTER TO THEIR ORNATE KEEP, AS URAZAI TENDS TO THREE BRAZIER-MOUNTED LENSES...
HE PLACES EACH OF THE THREE DIRECTLY FACING ONE OF THE WOVEN MANDALAS.
HIS EYES HARDEN WARNINGLY UNTIL EVERY DRAFT AND BREEZE IN THE DOMED CHAMBER FALLS STILL, AND THEN HIS LIPS CURVE INTO A THIN SMILE.
THE MOMENT HAS COME--
--FOR THE DARK FUSING OF GLASS AND IMAGE!
YES--EACH LENS IS NOW INDELIBLY ETCHED WITH ONE OF THE THREE PATTERNS...
ALL GOES WELL.
TILTING EACH LENS ALMOST NINETY DEGREES FROM THE VERTICAL, NEARLY TO THE HORIZONTAL, URAZAI THEN REPOSITIONS THE THREE BRAZIERS SO THAT THEY ECHO THE ISLE'S OWN ARRANGEMENT OF MOUNTAIN PEAKS.
PIVOTING SLIGHTLY INWARD ON THEIR HINGES AS THEY DO, THEY SEEM TO AWAIT SOMETHING AT THE EQUIDISTANT CENTER OF THEIR TRIANGLE... AS DOES THE KHITAN MAGE HIMSELF.
THE CIRCLE OF SORCERY IS COMPLETE.
AND NOW... THE GAME OF SPIDER AND FLY BEGINS...!

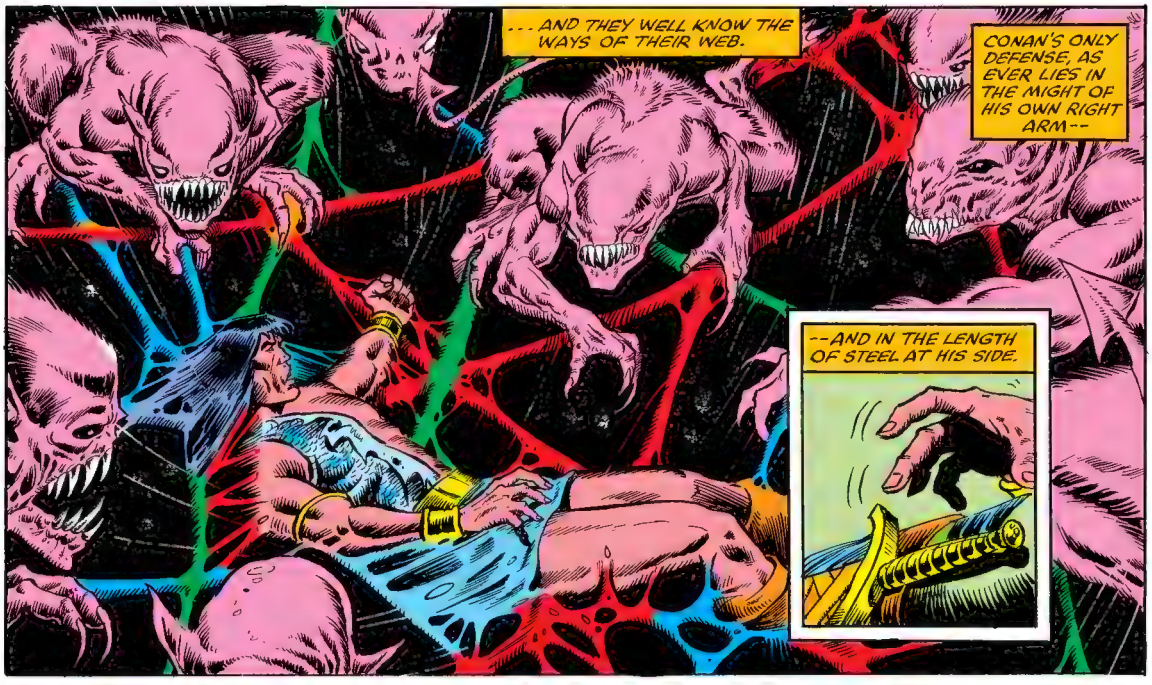
DAWN FINDS TARANTIA ABUZZ WITH CONSPIRACY...
PASS THE WORD TO THE OTHER REBELS--WE STRIKE AT DUSK.
...EVEN AS THE KING SETS OUT FOR THE ISLE'S THIRD AND FINAL PEAK.
NO MATERIAL FOR WINGS THIS TIME-- THE FLAMES HAVE SEEN TO THAT.
I'LL JUST HAVE TO FACE WHATEVER DANGERS THE GROUND MAY HOLD.
AND MONSTERS THERE BE APLENTY, YET EACH SEEMS MORIBUND...
...AND CURIOUSLY DISINTERESTED IN HIS PASSING.
INDEED, IT IS ALMOST AS IF THE THIRD WIZARD WERE NOT EVEN TRYING. IS HE ASLEEP, CONAN WONDERS, OR ARROGANTLY OVER-CONFIDENT?
OR IS THE SORCERER, IN TRUTH, GONE?
HAS HE, UPON LEARNING THE FATE OF HIS TWO FELLOW WIZARDS, FLED--?
WHATEVER THE REASONS, CONAN SCALES THE FINAL PEAK WITHOUT CHALLENGE.
STILL WARY OF TRAPS, HOWEVER, HE ENTERS THE KHITAN STRUCTURE SLOWLY...
...AND FINDS--
EH--?! STAND BACK AND LET ME DEPART! I'VE WON MY PRIZE FAIRLY--HAD TO SLAY A CURSED ORIENTAL WIZARD TO GET IT--
--AND BY BEL'S NIMBLE FINGERS, I'LL LET NO ONE TAKE IT FROM ME--ESPECIALLY NOT AN OAFISH BARBARIAN!
WATCH YOUR TONGUE, DOG!
YOU SAY THE WIZARD OF THIS DWELLING IS DEAD--?
SHOW ME-- AND I'LL LET YOU DEPART WITH YOUR LOOT.


THE DUBIOUS THIEF HESITATES BUT BRIEFLY...
VERY WELL--I'D RATHER NOT CROSS A MAN OF YOUR SIZE IF THERE'S A SIMPLER WAY OUT.
FOLLOW ME.
THERE, FRIEND--SPRAWLED ACROSS HIS BED IN THE DEEPEST SLEEP HE'LL EVER KNOW.
CONAN GRUNTS.
IT IS THE THIRD MAGE, THE ONE CALLED URAZAI, THE ONE WHOSE FACE APPEARED TO HIM IN THE CISTERN...
EVEN IN DEATH, URAZAI REMINDS CONAN OF ANOTHER KHITAN MAGE--YAH CHIENG--WHO ONCE ABDUCTED ZENOBIA... BUT THIS SORCERER, IT SEEMS, WAS HARDLY OF YAH CHIENG'S METTLE.
PERHAPS WEALTH, AS THE PHILOSOPHER ALCEMIDES CLAIMS, IS INDEED THE WORLD'S TRUE POWER...
AYE--WITH ENOUGH COIN TO PAY CYNNERA AND MIMUS AND THE OTHERS, THE THREE DWELLERS OF THIS ISLE COULD WELL AFFORD TO CAUSE ALL THE TROUBLE THEY DID, EVEN WITHOUT MUCH IN THE WAY OF SORCEROUS POWER.
AND TOO, THEY VIEWED AQUILONIA AS SOME SORT OF MYSTICAL SITE VITAL TO THEM--MAYHAP TO STRENGTHEN THEIR OWN DEFICIENT SORCERY...
STILL, IF A COMMON THIEF COULD SO EASILY SLAY ONE OF THEM, THEN WHY DID THEY DARE CHALLENGE A KING SO DIRECTLY--?
WELL, OUTLANDER? SATISFIED?
AYE--I'VE NO CHOICE.
THEN OUR SCORE IS SETTLED--BUT THE SUN SETS...
...AND I'VE NO DESIRE TO LEAVE HERE IN THE DARK--NOT AFTER SEEING THOSE MONSTERS ON THE WAY UP.
AYE--IT SEEMS WE'RE BOTH FORCED TO SPEND THE NIGHT, FRIEND THIEF.
IF IT'S FRIENDS WE ARE NOW, THEN LET'S GO TO THE TOWER ROOM TOGETHER.
I SAW FOOD THERE.

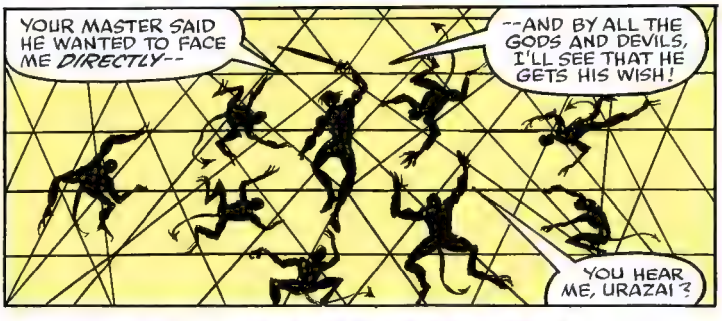

IN TARANTIA, WHISTLES SOUND AT DUSK.
THE CLOAKS OF COMMONERS ARE WHIPPED OFF TO REVEAL ARMED MERCENARIES.
AND THE ORCHESTRATED CHAOS OF AN UPRISING BEGINS.
ITS FIRST TARGET IS THE PALACE.
FIND TROCERO! TELL HIM TO ALERT PROSPERO AND THE QUEEN!
I...I FEARED THIS WOULD HAPPEN WITH CONAN GONE!
WORRY NOT, ZENOBIA--A DEFENSE IS BEING MOUNTED AT THE BARRACKS.
AYE--THE IRON LEGION WILL SOON PUT THEM DOWN.
INDEED, PROSPERO, AND AS HEIR TO THE THRONE IT'S MY PLACE TO AID THEM--TO LEAD THEM IN DEFENSE OF MY MOTHER AND QUEEN!
NO, CONN! COME BACK! YOU'RE TOO YOUNG!
I'M A FULLY TRAINED SOLDIER, MOTHER--AND IT'S TIME I WAS TESTED IN REAL BATTLE!
WHILE, IN URAZAI'S TOWER...
JUST LET ME FIRE THESE BRAZIERS, OUTLANDER, AND WE CAN EAT OUR FOOD WARM.
A STRANGE DESIGN FOR COOKING BRAZIERS...
UNNOTICED BY CONAN, THE FIRES PROJECT THREE STRANGE PATTERNS ON THE DOMED CEILING...
...THREE SHIMMERING CIRCLES OF SORCERY.

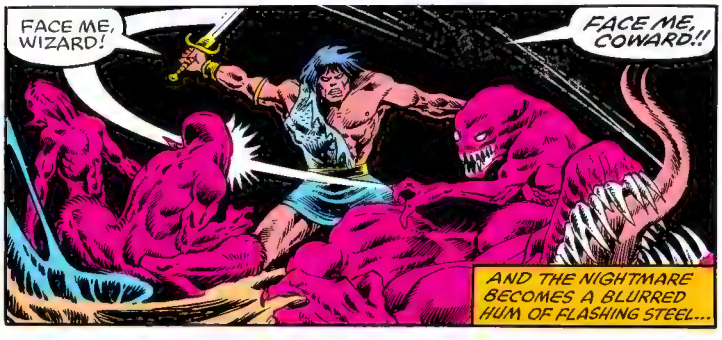

NOW... A BETTER ANGLE TO CATCH THE WARMTH FOR OUR MEAT...
TWO OF THE PATTERNS MERGE, SUPERIMPOSED IN GREATER INTRICACY.
AND NOW THE THIRD...
WAIT--THOSE THINGS MAY BE INSTRUMENTS OF SORCERY! YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DOING--!
OH, BUT I DO, CONAN--AS YOU CAN SEE BY LOOKING AT THE CEILING.
YOU KNOW MY NAME, THIEF?! BUT HOW--
I AM NOT A THIEF.
MITRA AND ISHTAR! THE CEILING--!
THE THREE MANDALAS, UNITED, BEGIN TO SPIN--AND CONAN'S MIND SEEMS TO HURTLE ACROSS DIZZYING GULFS...
THEN, A SOFT SOUND, AND...
CROM'S EYES!
TINY DEVILS--SWARMING OVER ME LIKE RATS--BITING ME!
DENSE FOG FILLS THE CHAMBER...

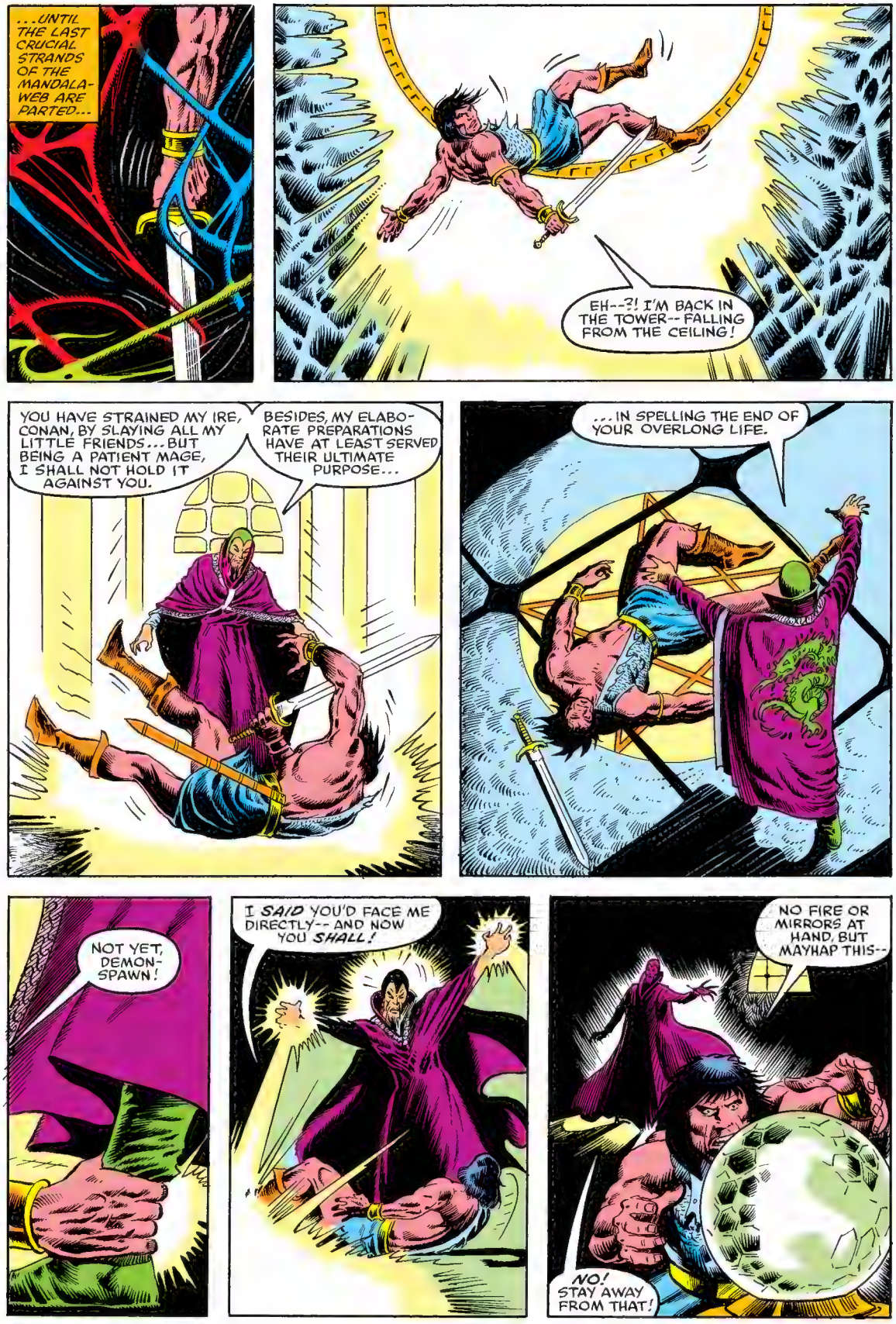

AND WHEN IT DISSIPATES, WHERE ONCE STOOD A THIEF NOW STANDS . . .
. . . URAZAI, THE CRAFTY ONE, THE ONE OF FEW WORDS AND MANY FAINT SMILES.
EYES SPELLBOUND TO THE WHIRLING CEILING, CONAN FEELS RATHER THAN SEES THE CRUEL WIZARD'S PRESENCE.
THEN THE CEILING-IMAGE LOCKS TO A HALT-- AND THE ENTIRE TOWER CHAMBER SPINS ABRUPTLY IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION . . .
. . . PITCHING CONAN'S BODY AFTER HIS MIND--
--PLUNGING IT THROUGH AN ABYSS OF EVER THICKER DARKNESS . . .
. . . UNTIL--
CROM AND MITRA--! WH-WHERE . . .
HE FREEZES, FEELING THE TUG OF STRANDS UNDER HIS BACK.
THE TINY HOMUNCULI . . .
. . . ARE NO LONGER TINY . . .

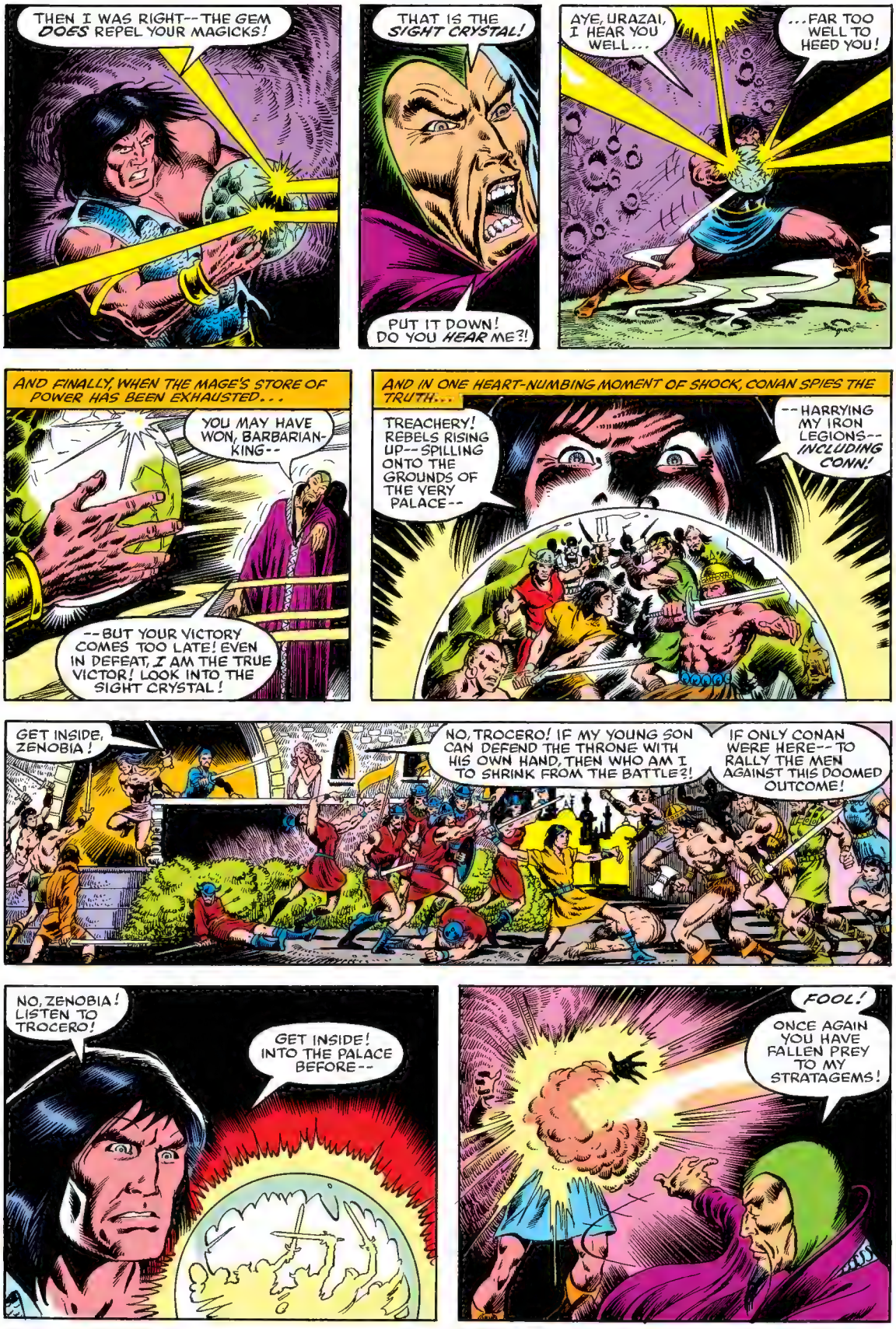

...AND THEY WELL KNOW THE WAYS OF THEIR WEB.
CONAN'S ONLY DEFENSE, AS EVER LIES IN THE MIGHT OF HIS OWN RIGHT ARM--
--AND IN THE LENGTH OF STEEL AT HIS SIDE.

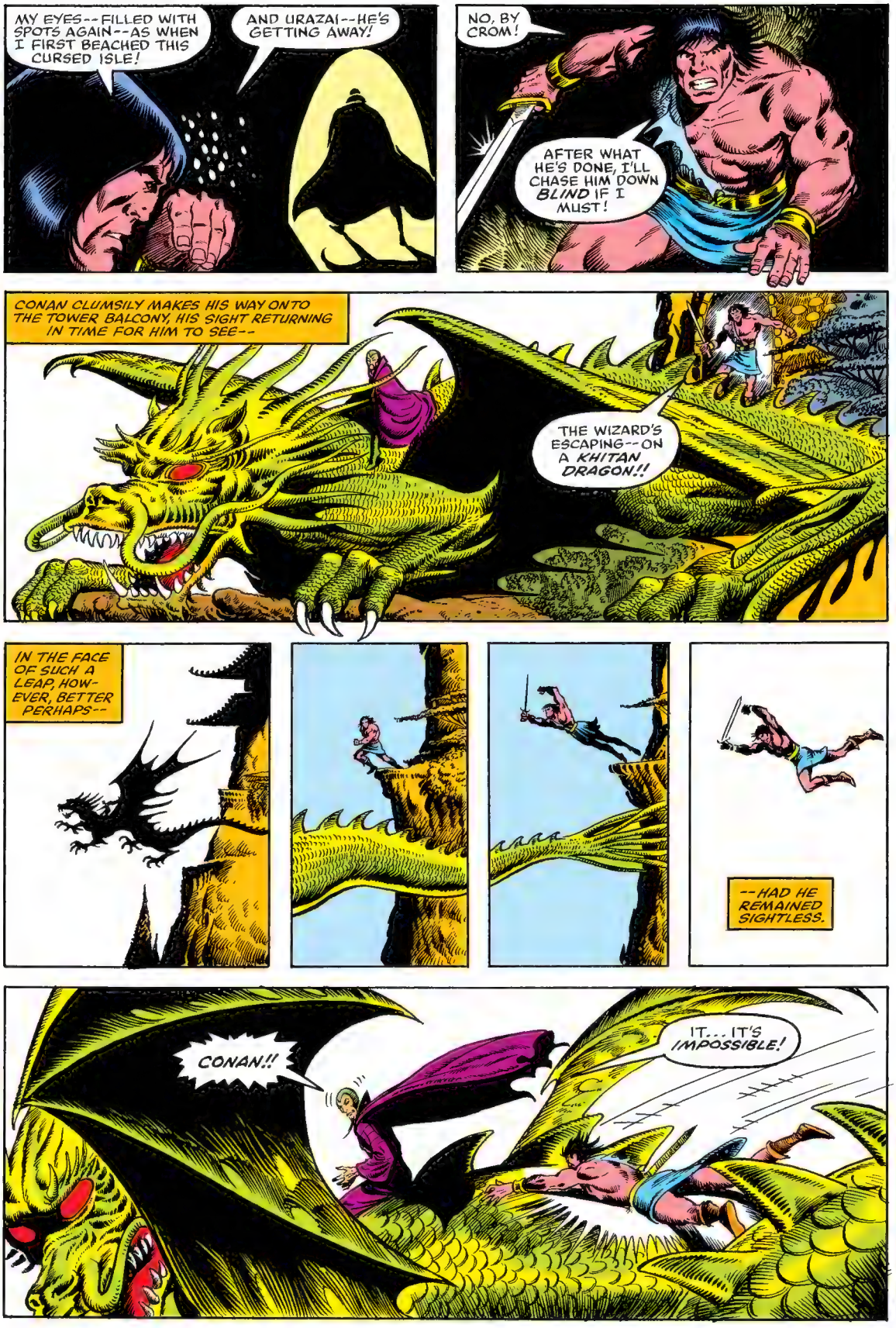
I KNOW NOT WHAT MANNER OF CROM-CURSED TRICKERY HAS ASSAILED ME--
--BUT I DO KNOW THIS...


YOUR MASTER SAID HE WANTED TO FACE ME DIRECTLY--
--AND BY ALL THE GODS AND DEVILS, I'LL SEE THAT HE GETS HIS WISH!
YOU HEAR ME, URAZAI?


FACE ME, WIZARD!
FACE ME, COWARD!!
AND THE NIGHTMARE BECOMES A BLURRED HUM OF FLASHING STEEL...

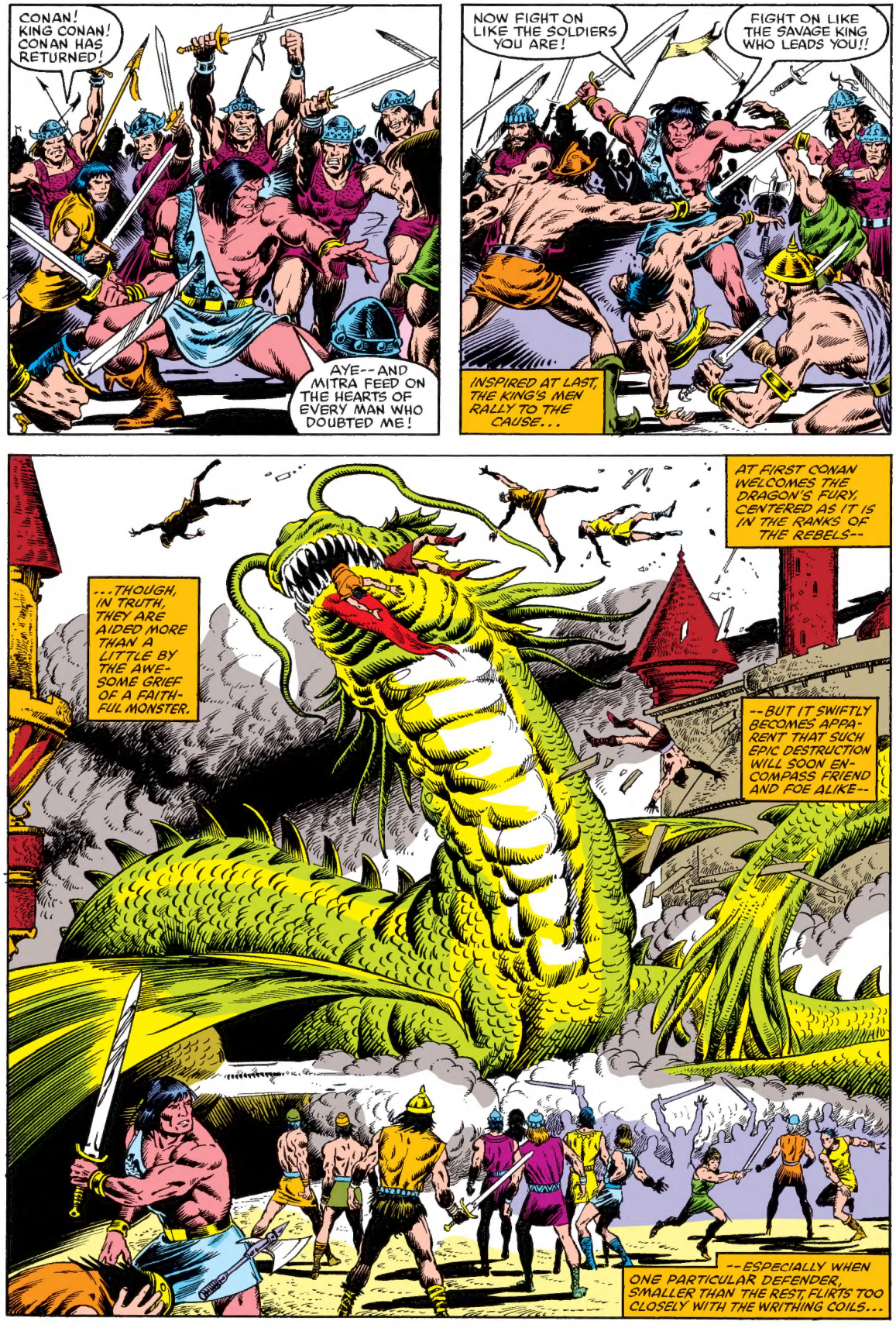

...UNTIL THE LAST CRUCIAL STRANDS OF THE MANDALA-WEB ARE PARTED...
EH--?! I'M BACK IN THE TOWER-- FALLING FROM THE CEILING!
YOU HAVE STRAINED MY IRE, CONAN, BY SLAYING ALL MY LITTLE FRIENDS... BUT BEING A PATIENT MAGE, I SHALL NOT HOLD IT AGAINST YOU.
BESIDES, MY ELABORATE PREPARATIONS HAVE AT LEAST SERVED THEIR ULTIMATE PURPOSE...
...IN SPELLING THE END OF YOUR OVERLONG LIFE.
NOT YET, DEMON-SPAWN!
I SAID YOU'D FACE ME DIRECTLY-- AND NOW YOU SHALL!
NO FIRE OR MIRRORS AT HAND, BUT MAYHAP THIS--
NO! STAY AWAY FROM THAT!


THEN I WAS RIGHT--THE GEM DOES REPEL YOUR MAGICKS!
THAT IS THE SIGHT CRYSTAL!
PUT IT DOWN! DO YOU HEAR ME?!
AYE, URAZAI, I HEAR YOU WELL...
...FAR TOO WELL TO HEED YOU!
AND FINALLY, WHEN THE MAGE'S STORE OF POWER HAS BEEN EXHAUSTED...
YOU MAY HAVE WON, BARBARIAN-KING--
--BUT YOUR VICTORY COMES TOO LATE! EVEN IN DEFEAT, I AM THE TRUE VICTOR! LOOK INTO THE SIGHT CRYSTAL!
AND IN ONE HEART-NUMBING MOMENT OF SHOCK, CONAN SPIES THE TRUTH...
TREACHERY! REBELS RISING UP--SPILLING ONTO THE GROUNDS OF THE VERY PALACE--
--HARRYING MY IRON LEGIONS--INCLUDING CONN!
GET INSIDE, ZENOBIA!
NO, TROCERO! IF MY YOUNG SON CAN DEFEND THE THRONE WITH HIS OWN HAND, THEN WHO AM I TO SHRINK FROM THE BATTLE?!
IF ONLY CONAN WERE HERE--TO RALLY THE MEN AGAINST THIS DOOMED OUTCOME!
NO, ZENOBIA! LISTEN TO TROCERO!
GET INSIDE! INTO THE PALACE BEFORE--
FOOL!
ONCE AGAIN YOU HAVE FALLEN PREY TO MY STRATAGEMS!

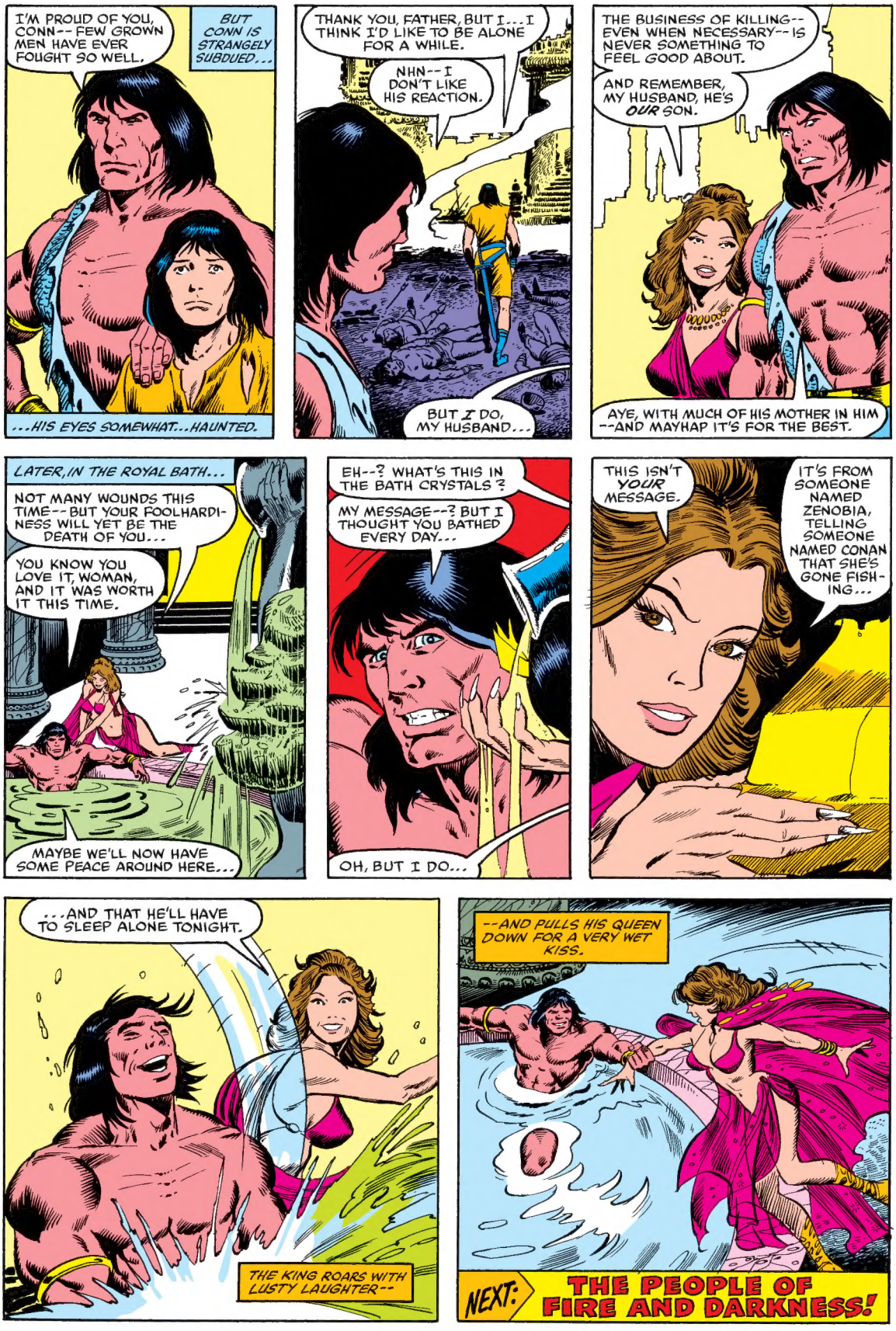

MY EYES--FILLED WITH SPOTS AGAIN--AS WHEN I FIRST BEACHED THIS CURSED ISLE!
AND URAZAI--HE'S GETTING AWAY!
NO, BY CROM!
AFTER WHAT HE'S DONE, I'LL CHASE HIM DOWN BLIND IF I MUST!
CONAN CLUMSILY MAKES HIS WAY ONTO THE TOWER BALCONY, HIS SIGHT RETURNING IN TIME FOR HIM TO SEE--
THE WIZARD'S ESCAPING--ON A KHITAN DRAGON!!
IN THE FACE OF SUCH A LEAP, HOWEVER, BETTER PERHAPS--
--HAD HE REMAINED SIGHTLESS.
CONAN!!
IT... IT'S IMPOSSIBLE!

MAYBE SO, WIZARD, BUT IF YOU DON'T GUIDE THIS BEAST STRAIGHT TO TARANTIA--THE IMPOSSIBLE WILL SLIT YOUR STINKING THROAT!
OBEY AND I'LL SPARE YOUR LIFE --NOW THAT YOUR POWERS HAVE WANED.
FOR THE FIRST TIME, URAZAI RESPONDS WITHOUT A SMILE--AND THE DRAGON WHEELS OFF TO THE NORTH, ACROSS THE BENIGHTED ISLE...
FASTER, URAZAI!
...TOWARD THE MAINLAND...
...AND TARANTIA BEYOND.
HEAR ME, WARRIORS OF TARANTIA! I AM THE SON OF CONAN AND YOU FIGHT AT MY SIDE!
FIGHT ON, WARRIORS!
FIGHT ON!!
DOGGEDLY, THE TROOPS DO INDEED RALLY...
...BUT CONN IS STILL TOO YOUNG TO WORK THAT SPECIAL MAGIC WHICH TRANSCENDS HOPELESSNESS. HIS INEXPERIENCED LEADERSHIP FAILS TO OVERCOME THE HORROR OF THE SLAUGHTER.
THEN--
IRON LEGIONS!
CONAN OF AQUILONIA HAS RETURNED!
NOW WE WILL--WHAT?!
YOU POINT AT CONN, URAZAI?
YOU DARE AIM YOUR VILE MAGICKS AT MY SON?!

BY CROM, YOU DESERVE TO DIE-- LIKE A MADDENED CUR!
BUT...BUT YOU PROMISED MY LIFE--!
I LIED.
SWACT
I GIVE YOU YOUR LEADER, TRAITOROUS SCUM!
AND NOW, BY CROM, I'LL GIVE EVERY FILTHY REBEL AMONG YOU THE SAME HE GOT!
ITS MASTER DEAD, THE GROTESQUE DRAGON HAS ALREADY BEGUN ITS PLUNGE IN AN AGONY OF RAGE...
AS BEST HE CAN, CONAN GUIDES IT STRAIGHT INTO THE REBEL ONSLAUGHT--
--LEAPING CLEAR AT THE LAST POSSIBLE MOMENT, HIS EYES ALREADY SEEKING CONN AND THE PALACE DEFENDERS.


CONAN! KING CONAN! CONAN HAS RETURNED!
AYE--AND MITRA FEED ON THE HEARTS OF EVERY MAN WHO DOUBTED ME!
NOW FIGHT ON LIKE THE SOLDIERS YOU ARE!
FIGHT ON LIKE THE SAVAGE KING WHO LEADS YOU!!
INSPIRED AT LAST, THE KING'S MEN RALLY TO THE CAUSE...
AT FIRST CONAN WELCOMES THE DRAGON'S FURY, CENTERED AS IT IS IN THE RANKS OF THE REBELS--
...THOUGH, IN TRUTH, THEY ARE AIDED MORE THAN A LITTLE BY THE AWESOME GRIEF OF A FAITHFUL MONSTER.
--BUT IT SWIFTLY BECOMES APPARENT THAT SUCH EPIC DESTRUCTION WILL SOON ENCOMPASS FRIEND AND FOE ALIKE--
--ESPECIALLY WHEN ONE PARTICULAR DEFENDER, SMALLER THAN THE REST, FLIRTS TOO CLOSELY WITH THE WRITHING COILS...

CONN!
GET BACK, SON!!
IT IS THEN THAT CONAN DECIDES TO PUT THE BEAST OUT OF ITS MISERY--
--BEFORE REJOINING THE TURNING TIDE OF BATTLE.
WHY DID YOU PUSH ME ASIDE, FATHER? I COULD HAVE TAKEN THE BEAST!
NO DOUBT, SON-- BUT FOR THE TIME BEING WHY NOT LIMIT YOURSELF TO A DOZEN OR SO HUMAN FOES?
THEY'LL SUFFICE FOR YOUR FIRST TEST OF FIRE...
IF A DOZEN REMAIN-- BUT MOST OF THEM HAVE ALREADY SEEN THE FUTURE OF THEIR FOLLY...
THEY'RE TURNING TAILS --RUNNING LIKE DOGS!
AYE-- AND A PRETTY SIGHT, IS IT NOT?
MAGNIFICENT FIGHTING, MY KING! AFTER SUCH A ROUT, IT'LL BE A LONG TIME BEFORE THE REBELS AGAIN DARE SUCH A MOVE!
AYE, TROCERO...
...ESPECIALLY SINCE I'VE NOW RID THE WORLD OF THE THREE POWERS BEHIND THEM.


I'M PROUD OF YOU, CONN-- FEW GROWN MEN HAVE EVER FOUGHT SO WELL.
BUT CONN IS STRANGELY SUBDUED...
...HIS EYES SOMEWHAT...HAUNTED.
THANK YOU, FATHER, BUT I...I THINK I'D LIKE TO BE ALONE FOR A WHILE.
NHN-- I DON'T LIKE HIS REACTION.
BUT I DO, MY HUSBAND...
THE BUSINESS OF KILLING-- EVEN WHEN NECESSARY-- IS NEVER SOMETHING TO FEEL GOOD ABOUT.
AND REMEMBER, MY HUSBAND, HE'S OUR SON.
AYE, WITH MUCH OF HIS MOTHER IN HIM --AND MAYHAP IT'S FOR THE BEST.
LATER, IN THE ROYAL BATH...
NOT MANY WOUNDS THIS TIME-- BUT YOUR FOOLHARDINESS WILL YET BE THE DEATH OF YOU...
YOU KNOW YOU LOVE IT, WOMAN, AND IT WAS WORTH IT THIS TIME.
MAYBE WE'LL NOW HAVE SOME PEACE AROUND HERE...
EH--? WHAT'S THIS IN THE BATH CRYSTALS?
MY MESSAGE--? BUT I THOUGHT YOU BATHED EVERY DAY...
OH, BUT I DO...
THIS ISN'T YOUR MESSAGE.
IT'S FROM SOMEONE NAMED ZENOBIA, TELLING SOMEONE NAMED CONAN THAT SHE'S GONE FISHING...
...AND THAT HE'LL HAVE TO SLEEP ALONE TONIGHT.
THE KING ROARS WITH LUSTY LAUGHTER--
--AND PULLS HIS QUEEN DOWN FOR A VERY WET KISS.
NEXT: THE PEOPLE OF FIRE AND DARKNESS!

KING CONAN

c/o MARVEL COMICS GROUP
575 Madison Avenue
New York, New York 10022

LOUISE JONES
EDITOR
DANNY FINGEROTH
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Dear Louise and the Gang,

Congratulations — KING CONAN #11 was a terrific comic! I enjoyed the appearance of old Alcemides (too brief), and I hope to see more of him in the future. Also, how about having some of Conan's friends (like Murillo or Erfu) appear in the pages of KING CONAN soon?

I have one question: How is Conan's sword proportionately the same in size both to Death Shaper and to Conan's seemingly smaller frame?

Nice comic. Keep up the good work!

Ryan McGaughy
15 Upper Falls Ck. Rd.
Elma, WA 98541

Conan's sword was certainly smaller in proportion to his foe than it was to the King himself, Ryan. It's just that a funny little thing that we up here call perpective makes the sword appear to be larger or smaller depending on the angle of view in any given panel. Speaking of perspective, here comes another missive over the horizon...

Dear Louise,

Today I bought a copy of KING CONAN #11, and I'm sorry to say that I have rarely been so disappointed in the artwork of a Marvel comic. I started buying Marvels back in the sixties, and I've been a fairly faithful follower ever since. I've been an especial fan of the CONAN mags since they first appeared in the seventies. Some of the very finest artwork in comics appeared in your CONAN titles, and I regret that this current issue just wasn't up to par. I'm a very visually-oriented person, and that's perhaps why I still enjoy high quality comics(at age 30 in graduate school),but issue#11just didn't afford me all the pleasure I had paid for. It might be that I've been spoiled by the "greatest" such as Windsor-Smith, Neal Adams, and John Buscema, but I'm hoping you folks can spoil me once more. Please!

Henry J. Vester III
16 Venus Court
Tiburon CA 94920

With an address like Venus Court, Henry, it's easy to see how you might be spoiled on visual pleasures! But seriously, Marvel boasts such a variety of artists that there are bound to be times that one fan's fave is not another fan's rave. As witness the next letter which presents a differing viewpoint...

Dear Doug, Alan, Ernie, etc (King's men all) —

When I first saw Alan Kupperberg's name on the credits of KING CONAN #11, I grew apprehensive. Alan's artwork has a place in Marvel's magazines, but I didn't feel that it was on this particular title. Don't get me wrong, I've often found Alan's work to be very much to my liking. AVENGERS #209 and 212, DR. STRANGE #32, and MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE #75 stand, I feel, with some of the best work done at Marvel. However, I just didn't feel that his style suited Conan.

But... I have a confession to make (Do I have to say it?). I was *wrong!* "The Haunter of the Cenotaph" was extremely well-produced. Doug's writing was superb, as always. Alan's artwork was a welcome surprise, and his layouts on the last half of the story were absolutely superb.

Just a few questions, while I've got your attention:

The Bullpen Bulletins listed this issue's inkers as Steve Mitchell and Ricardo Villamonte, but the book credits list Ernie Chan. Now correct me if I'm wrong, but did all three have a hand in the inking?

Where's John Buscema?

You didn't really kill Cynnera, did you? She's good enough to warrant a return.

Finally, a couple of requests: Bring back Conan's family; keep the beard!; and give Alan Kupperberg a regular book to draw. Thanks for listening.

Greg "Hawkeye" Fuhr
2132 Rae Street
Regina, Saskatchewan,
Canada

John Buscema's back as our CONAN THE BARBARIAN regular penciler, and that, along with the Big One's SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN pencils, takes up a comfortable few hours a week from much-sought-after John. As for the inks on #11... we *goofed.* Earnest Ernie was slated to ink it, but due to other commitments, couldn't. The folks who finally did ink the issue were *Steve Mitchell, Ricardo Villamonte*, and newcomer *Mel Candido.* (Sorry we didn't give ya credit then, guys, for the gorgeous job you did.)

Cynnera, of course, is as dead as you see her. (What's that, you didn't see her corpse in any panel? Well...)

Dear Marvel,

Having just been turned on to KING CONAN, I started my collection with issue #9. Could you tell me where I might purchase back issues #1-8 of the Aquilonian Extravaganza? Thanks, and Make Mine Marvel.

Tony Breland
104 North 5th Stree
Lipscomb, AL 35020

While we folks at Marvel are too wrapped up in our photostats and plot synopses to be able to run a back issue department, there are plenty of specialty shops — in fact they're simply blossoming, bless 'em — all over the country, Tony. Some of them even advertise in these very pages. You'll certainly be able to get those back issues by mail, but, who knows, there may very well be a comic shop right nearby Lipscomb, Alabama itself. Anyone out there know of one?

Dear Captivating Conanites,

I have been reading CONAN and KING CONAN for quite a few years now. In a recent issue I came across something about the return of Elric in Graphic Novel form sometime in early spring. Having thrilled to Elric in the original Moorcock novels and in the CONAN and EPIC adaptations, I just must find out where I can acquire the book to add it to my collection.

Thanks for bringing such wonderful literary joys to a grateful nation of dedicated readers. May your ink never blot and your ideas never cease!

Chris Hunter
617 Mountcastle
Johnson City, TN 37601

Well, Chris, if you follow the instructions outlined to Tony Breland, above, you should be able to get your hands on the new ELRIC GRAPHIC NOVEL quicker than you can say 'Stormbringer!' And while you're at it, you may want to go for broke and pick up our celebrated first graphic novel, Jim Starlin's THE DEATH OF CAPTAIN MARVEL, already in its second printing after the first round sellout!

Dear Editors:

KING CONAN #11 did have one flaw in it. When King Conan took his trip to Nemedia, he allowed his beard to grow. I've been following the Marvel Conan books from the start. Time after time, Conan was put into situations where he could not possibly shave for days at a time, yet never so much as developed a five o'clock shadow. After all these years and all these adventures, either you must admit Conan simply does not need to shave — or else do an enormous amount of explaining of those dozens and dozens of times where he never needed one. He had no time, sometimes no water either, sometimes no sharp edge. Add to that the fact that, since the early years, Conan has been colored visibly more ruddy than the other racially white persons shown. Finally, add to that that we know a little of his mother but nothing of his father, and we conclude Conan cannot grow a beard because he is at least partially Pict by race, if not by culture or loyalties. The Picts of course, in the Howardian mythos, are analogous to American Indians, who to this day seldom, if ever, need to shave.

But in any case, for whatever reason, Conan has never needed to shave before — it's too well-established to deny. So how come a beard now?

Nichael N. Tierstein
Emory Towers, Apartment 52
Orangeburg, SC 29115

Loyal Conan readers, if we ever needed you, we need you *now!* Help us out of this seemingly insoluble problem, and the keys to Tarantia shall be yours (or at least a No-Prize)! Write quick — we're stumped!